STUDENTS OF COLOR IN WHITE-DOMINATED COLLEGE CLASSROOMS: AN EXAMINATION OF RACIALIZED ROLES, SAFETY AND EMPOWERMENT

by

Deanna Maria Blackwell

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of
The University of Utah
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Education, Culture, and Society

The University of Utah

August 2010

The University of Utah Graduate School

STATEMENT OF DISSERTATION APPROVAL

The dissertation of **Deanna Maria Blackwell**

has been approved by the following supervisory committee members:

Harvey Kantor	, Chair	**April 23, 2010**
		Date Approved
Donna Deyhle	, Member	**April 23, 2010**
		Date Approved
Susan L. Morrow	, Member	**April 23, 2010**
		Date Approved
Audrey Thompson	, Member	**April 23, 2010**
		Date Approved
David Quijada	, Member	**April 23, 2010**
		Date Approved

and by **Harvey Kantor**, Chair of the Department of **Education, Culture, and Society**

and by Charles A. Wight, Dean of The Graduate School.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation reports data I collected using qualitative research methods to investigate the racial dynamics that students of color experienced in predominantly White college classrooms. I used Black Feminist Standpoint Theory to analyze interviews I conducted with twelve students of color from diverse racial ethnic minority backgrounds including African American, Asian American, Chicana/o, Mixed Race, Native American, and Pacific Islander. Their testimonies revealed how racial tensions unfolded around exchanges between students, professors, pedagogy, and the curriculum in ways that often left students of color not only outnumbered, but outpowered in what can be more accurately referred to as White-dominated classrooms. Participants entered college classrooms hoping to experience an education that addressed people of color and race-related issues in humanized ways. Not only did they find that race-related topics were addressed in decontextualized and stereotypical ways, but also came to an understanding as to how they were often silenced, marginalized, and stigmatized from the academic process.

In my study students of color discussed the strategies they used in college classrooms to create safety for themselves and other students. In several cases students of color debunked the idea that a White-dominated classroom could ever be safe for students of color. Also, research participants challenged the term

'empowerment' as used by radical educational theorists. They charged that they rarely if ever felt empowered, and questioned whether or not it was possible under the given circumstances of White-dominated college classrooms. Students redefined what counted as empowerment and instead described what I refer to as *powerful experiences*. These experiences spurred them on to achieve their educational and social justice oriented goals.

This dissertation is dedicated to students from marginalized groups in K-12 schools and in higher education who throughout history and now have defined empowerment on their own terms and determined to pursue it earnestly, courageously, and relentlessly.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to acknowledge all of the research participants who contributed the re-telling of their experiences to me for this study. Some of the stories you told were still fresh in your minds and hearts, and I am deeply humbled and honored that you entrusted me to serve as a messenger to carry your testimonies into the written word and into a public forum. I hope that in some way this research experience was cathartic for you, and that it will be available for others like you and me who needed to know that they were not the only one struggling towards empowerment in college classrooms that espoused the myth of colorblindness, intellectual freedom and democratic education. I see now that my career path is guided by an imperative to, as much as possible, clear the way for you.

I would like to express gratitude to the Department of Education, Culture, and Society for establishing an academic program where topics related to race and social justice in education could be critically examined by students from marginalized groups. I offer a special thank you to Donna Deyhle, Harvey Kantor, Leonard Hawes, Frank Margonis, Sue Morrow, David Quijada, William Smith, and Audrey Thompson for your expert instruction and enduring support and encouragement. Marty Schafer, Jay Garcia, Hannah Morgan, and the one of a kind Daryl Dowdell were largely responsible for facilitating administrative business on

my behalf and for consistently being warm, lovely, hilarious, and sometimes the only human contact I had for weeks at a time.

To Claudia Conner, Paulette Cross, Tony Dunbar, Maria Estrada, Cleveland Hayes, Andy Hurfor, Nana Osei Kofi, Luciano Marzulli, Melissa Moreno, Amadou Niang, Irene Ota, Monique Paes, Octavio Pimentel, Charise Nahm Pimentel, Azadeh Saljooghi, David Stovall, Eugene Tachinni, Brenda Valles and many more of my fellow colleagues, I could not have done this without your peer mentorship and true friendship.

Major sources of financial and intellectual support included the Jones Memorial Scholarship, Steffenson Cannon Scholarship, AERA Minority Fellowship Award, and the Future of Minority Studies (FMS) Summer Fellowship Award.

Also much love and respect goes out to the College of Education Dean's Office staff: Mary Burbank, Rosie Dayzie, Mindy Jones, Laura Marks, Ceceilia Tso, and especially to Clif Drew, Julie Rezai, and Dean Hardman.

Last but not least, I am grateful for the unceasing patience, gracious acceptance, and boundless generosity of my parents, Carolyn and Robert Blackwell. Without their support and genetic code it is likely I would have had to take a more travelled road.

CHAPTER 1

WHEN I WAS BEING ATTACKED IN THAT CLASS, WHERE WERE YOU?: THE POLITICS OF STUDENTS OF COLOR IN WHITE-DOMINATED COLLEGE CLASSROOMS

Statement of Problem

Desiree, Joaquin, and I set up chairs in preparation for the Diversity Film Night. All three of us identified as students of color. Desiree identified as Chicana. Joaquin identified as Native American and Mexican American. I identified myself as African American. We were excited to screen *Last Chance for Eden* (2003), a film in which eight men and women from diverse racial ethnic backgrounds discuss the impact of racial and gender stereotypes on their lives in the workplace, personal relationships, and within their families and communities. We calculated the number of students we expected to attend, debated over how to arrange the chairs, and wondered aloud if the food would arrive on time. Then quite easily in the midst of talking about the logistics of seating, we entered into a completely different conversation. It started with a simple, "How was your day?" In answering, Desiree and Joaquin began to talk about difficult experiences they were having in their classes. Desiree described a scenario in which a teacher tried to silence her when she [Desiree] pointed out the racial undertones in the way immigration was being

discussed in class. Desiree told us how she had reacted to the professor's defensiveness. She told us that while confident in her response to the situation, she still felt isolated socially and academically from her classmates and vulnerable to another attack. Joaquin offered to attend class with her to help alleviate her sense of anxiety and alienation. Joaquin added that escorting one another to classes was commonplace for him and his friends who had been in similar situations -- that is being outnumbered and outpowered as a student of color in a predominantly White classroom.

Over the course of the semester, I entered into many conversations with students of color who talked about the difficult racial dynamics they faced in their classrooms. I began to notice that although the consistent episodes of racial hostility in their classes had a damaging effect on students' social and academic experiences, they did not seem to deter these students from being persistent in obtaining their educational goals. Notably, their educational goals appeared to extend to academic coursework and beyond. They worked diligently in their classes, and at the same time supplemented the usual colorblind and Eurocentric curriculum with their own self-guided studies on topics such as the history of racial ethnic minority groups and the effects of U.S. immigration politics on Latino communities. I began to wonder how these students of color dealt with the racial dynamics they faced in class. What strategies did they use to protect themselves in the moment and prepare themselves for future incidents? I was especially interested in what they were learning in racially hostile classrooms. In this dissertation, I set out to build an understanding of how race works in the college classroom to press students of color into racially

charged and marginalized roles, and how in turn, students of color chart their own path towards empowered positions where they define and achieve their educational goals on their own terms.

Students of Color, College Classrooms and the 'Race Problem'

College classrooms and the students of color enrolled in them have been a topic examined previously by researchers. However, their work often isolates a single influencing factor and treats it as the sole cause of racial problems in the classroom. Few studies offer a comprehensive and critical examination of how predominantly White classrooms in predominantly White universities can easily and often do become sites of racial hostility in which students of color are targeted. Furthermore, the literature rarely considers how students of color can be oppressed, develop protective strategies and create their own definitions of empowerment in this racial terrain. The latter perspective is formulated through the lens of Black feminist theory, the framework I use to discuss the findings of my study. This theoretical lens provides an important departure from other studies by seeking to understand the experiences of students of color from their unique standpoint on the margins of a predominantly White college classroom.

One of the primary limiting factors of this literature is the way in which race is schematized. Studies that have examined students of color in predominantly White classrooms have conceptualized the problem of race in ways that have limited the scope of their analysis. They tend to investigate individual racism, institutional racism, or race practices as if one social phenomenon bore more weight on students

of color than another. In fact, the students in my study indicated that the racial politics of predominantly White universities, individual racial beliefs and attitudes, interactions between students and the professor, and course topics and readings all combined to create racially hostile classrooms in which they were pressed into playing marginalized roles. Furthermore, many studies infer that students of color are passive victims of oppression, pedagogical props for raising the consciousness of White students and White scholar-practitioners, or, in more extreme cases, unreliable sources of knowledge.

For example, the literature that deals with perceptions of differential treatment held by students of color treat race as a descriptor of an individual's cultural and biological background (Schulze and Tomal 2006; Booker 2007; Wong et al. 2008). Racial background is indicative of an individual's level of racial awareness and sensitivity. This schema implies that White teachers are not equipped to be conscious of racism and are often resistant to addressing issues of race outside of the lens of colorblindness (Sleeter 1993; King 1994). This is attributed to how racial socialization differently shapes members of White mainstream society and people of color from marginalized groups for their roles in society (Adams, Bell, and Griffin 1997). Thus, White professors are often viewed as inherently limited not only in constructing a critical framework about race, but also in providing for the educational needs of racial ethnic minority students. These researchers recommend that more faculty of color must be hired to eradicate racism in higher education contexts. I contend that while hiring faculty of color may be an appropriate response to inequities in institutional hiring practices that tend to privilege White mainstream

faculty, the increased presence of faculty of color does not necessarily make classrooms less racially hostile. In some instances, professors of color have reported that White students are openly disrespectful and antagonistic towards their authority in the classroom (Srivastava 1997; Hunter and Nettles 1999; Torres 2003; Baszile 2008). Conversely, professors of color may be invested in maintaining the status quo. The racial and cultural background of a professor or a student does not automatically produce a critical standpoint on race issues, a mission to abolish racism, or the capacity to be an advocate for students of color.

A more conservative stance within this approach treats race as an attitude that a student can adopt or shed as desired because it is not reflective of the classroom environment. Therefore, race is identified as a barrier only if students of color choose or perceive it to be one. The work of these scholars often expresses skepticism towards students' claims of differential treatment by their White classmates and professors because of race. I depart from these studies by taking the position that students of color are knowledge-holders and producers of knowledge (Delgado-Bernal 2002). I took the knowledge claims of the students who participated in my study very seriously on the grounds that they were experts in the realm of their own lived experience. Furthermore, I considered that their marginalized status provided them with an epistemic advantage of seeing into multiple worlds at once (Collins 2000; Harding 2004). Students of color in my study discussed race as a vital aspect of their social identity as African Americans, American Indian, Asian Americans, Chicana/o students, and mixed race students. However, in recounting their experiences in predominantly White classrooms

students of color described how the racial ideologies undergirding the curriculum, the institutionalized racism that privileged White professors and White students over students of color, and the racial beliefs espoused and acted upon by individuals in the classroom continually pressed them into subjugated positions.

In a second approach, scholars set up institutional racism as their target. Their focus is on changing the Eurocentric linear way that university classes are structured, both as linked together within a program of study and pedagogically inside classrooms (Tinto 1997; Hurtado et al. 2002; Quay and Quaglia 2004). They contend that if academic knowledge were organized in a more succinct, meaningful order, students would resonate more with course material and become more invested in academic success. In addition to reorganizing the structure of a program of study, these scholars find it essential that students build support networks with one another as a way to create a sense of comradery and belongingness that will increase their rate of persistence (Tinto 1975, 1997; Hurtado 2001). I contend that relationships in the classroom cannot be legislated, especially those that cross-racial lines. There is no way of knowing ahead of time how a student will define their racial identity or which institutional barriers they will face. Additionally, if there are preexisting tensions between students of color and White students, it is unclear how assigning them into cohorts will lead to comradery. Such a policy may radically change how students proceed through a program of study and change how classes are taught, but bringing students together physically cannot replace offering them specific tools for working through their conflicts. In fact, dynamics of race and power are often the kinds of obstacles that prevent students from fully bonding with one another (Agnew

et al. 2008). Alternatively, Villalpando makes a case for the formation of cohorts based on students from the same racial ethnic background. His research indicates that Chicano students thrive academically, socially and cross-culturally when they build Chicana/o student peer groups that allow them to "draw from their cultural resources to mitigate the racialized barriers erected by universities (Villalpando 2003, 619)." This study suggests that students should be encouraged to build cohorts with members of their racial ethnic group, and that this kind of peer group leads to college success. Furthermore, approaches oriented towards institutional racism often work from the premise that the institution has total control over students of color. It assumes that racist policies are the problem and once changed they can eradicate racism from the classroom context. The politics of racial groups and institutional racism are overlooked when the complexities of race and racism are overshadowed by the obvious displays of individual beliefs and practices. Racism often works on multiple levels at once to maintain the dominance of members of White mainstream groups. Legislating students into cohorts, for example, only addresses the issue at one level, and its effectiveness remains questionable.

A third set of literature, and the one that I draw from most for my study, looks at how the interactions between professors and students create a distinct social context for examining the more subtle workings of race. This approach draws back the layers of daily interpersonal interactions and dialogue to reveal the complex and potent dynamics of racism, power, and knowledge. One of the limits of this literature has been the tendency to focus on Whiteness, White students and White professors in order to illuminate the social production of race dynamics. In these

accounts of racist encounters in the classroom, White critical educators are intent on administering an antiracist education to White students, but in the process students of color are reduced to their personal accounts of racism. Their testimonials are used to provide White students with opportunities to learn that racism does exist. Another common characteristic of this literature is that these careful examinations of racial tensions in the classroom are often used by the critical educator to reflect upon and reshape their teaching theories and philosophies in ways that will relieve them from complicity and distance them from racial conflict inside the classroom.

Furthermore, because Whiteness is a social construction, White people are not the only ones who can become invested in it. These studies tend to think about race, power, and knowledge in complex ways, but maintain a notion of racial identity that defaults back to essentialized racial categories. Students of color can also do the racial work of maintaining the status quo in classrooms and resisting teacher efforts to critically examine race (Hunter and Nettles 1999). Research participants in my study talked about entering predominantly White classrooms and seeking out other students of color. Their assumption, and perhaps their hope, was that students of color were automatic allies. Instead they discovered that not all students of color aligned themselves with the experience of racial subjugation, and at times were invested in Whiteness. These two groups, those who identified as racial ethnic minorities and those who did not, eventually distanced themselves from one another. Student research participants talked about their disappointment, frustration, and anger at how students of color who they referred to as "invested [in Whiteness]" contributed to racial hostility in the classroom.

This set of literature typically positions students of color as victims and otherwise passive subjects of White racism. The scholar-practitioners that contribute to this body of scholarship often gather the material of their analysis from observations and reflections on the racial politics that emerged in their own classrooms (Ellsworth 1989; Jones 1999; Diangelo 2006). As a result, these teacher-generated, teacher-oriented studies are largely concerned with providing instructors with frameworks that will help them understand and navigate racial dynamics. In doing so, students of color often play a marginal role in analysis, serving mainly as the actors in a racial drama that has unfolded around the professor or White students. For example, Boler (2000) is a conscientious instructor seeking to hold White mainstream students' accountable for their racist remarks in class. She advocates for the use of an *affirmative action pedagogy* that will protect students of color from hate speech and require White students to research their claims. While I agree that White students should be held accountable for racist remarks, this particular intervention could actually disempower students of color by getting rid of their opportunity to "talk back" to their peers and speak up for themselves. My study calls attention to the fact that sometimes the strategies that professors use to create a racially sensitive atmosphere can actually substitute racism for infantilization (Lugones and Spelman 1990). In this project, I set out to show how students of color are positioned in oppressive ways in the predominantly White classroom, and point out how some of those ways were often perceived by professors and students as culturally sensitive. I also discuss how students of color find ways to protect

themselves from racial subjugation and in the process begin to redefine and find empowerment.

Experiences in racially hostile classrooms shaped students of colors' notion of empowerment. There were many times when racial dynamics marginalized them from the academic process. This put them in a position to weigh their personal integrity against their academic goals. For example, participants in my study were high achievers in a traditional sense. They earned average to excellent grades, were active members of campus organizations and student government that marked them as leaders among their peers. They were also exceptional students in nontraditional ways. Most of them were first-generation college students, primary income earners and support people in their families, and either full-time or part-time employees. They also were actively involved in informal networks of support in which students of color, lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered and undocumented students served as advocates for one another on campus and in the surrounding community. Their investment in multiple aspects of academic, social, professional, familial life influenced their notion of educational achievement and success. For example, several student research participants told me of having received a low grade in a class where they had been targeted by a racially hostile professor. In these cases, students felt it was futile to dispute the low grade. Instead they concluded that the grade was not as important as refusing to conform to status quo ways of speaking and dealing with race. Their personal and academic integrity was, in their opinion, worth the cost of a low grade. One student accepted a grade of C and noted that he would not have in the past. His reasoning was that the grade was a direct result of

the numerous responsibilities he had to fill towards himself, his family, and his community both on and off campus. For him, the grade represented his earnest efforts to fulfill those commitments. In these and other ways, student research participants had begun to recognize that empowerment and academic achievement could become competing goals in White-dominated classrooms. In the following chapters I discuss in more detail how students of color redefined what counts as 'safety' and 'empowerment' in racially hostile classrooms.

One of the key distinguishing factors of my dissertation project from the aforementioned studies is that I use Black Feminist Standpoint Theory. Rather than talking about students of color, hypothesizing their position, or making inferences about them, I interviewed students of color to learn more about how they were thinking about their experiences in college classrooms. Using Black Feminist Theory to interpret the data provided me tools for discussing how race, power, and knowledge work at multiple levels in predominantly White classrooms to subjugate students of color. As a result of subjugation, students of color see the workings of race in the classroom from a standpoint that demystifies mainstream assertions of authority and superiority. Should they decide to claim this alternative, albeit marginalized viewpoint, students of color can use it to cultivate an "other way of knowing" about self, society and academia. This critical knowledge they apply towards building a self-defined standpoint about safety and empowerment in the classroom. Then they proceed to instruct themselves through a curriculum about race and racism based on their everyday lived experiences. In the process, they teach

themselves essential academic skills that help them achieve their self-defined educational goals.

This study was structured to address the following guiding questions:

1) Do students of color find that they are expected to take on certain racialized roles in relation to the professor and students in college classrooms? What are the costs and benefits of playing into or refusing those roles?

2) What strategies do students of color use to navigate racialized roles and racially hostile classrooms? What strategies do they use to create safe spaces for themselves in the classroom?

3) In what ways do racially hostile classrooms impact the kinds of education students of color acquire in college classrooms?

In sum, this research project aims to examine the racialized roles that students of color are positioned into; the strategies they have developed to protect themselves and otherwise navigate their way out of oppressive racial dynamics; and the lessons that lead them to redefine safety and empowerment in racially hostile classrooms.

The Research Setting

When I have told people that I conducted a study about students of color at the University of Utah, they think I am crazy. There is a misconception that there are no people of color in the entire state of Utah and that the university must be a mirror image. People who live outside of Utah sometimes make the joke, "How many Black people are there in Utah - you and who else?" Their jokes imply that even if there were racial ethnic minorities in Utah, the percentage would be lower than in any city in the U.S. According to the 2006-2008 U.S. Census Bureau, the total population for Salt Lake City, Utah was 184,881 residents. Approximately 149, 140 identified as White, 40, 578 identified as Hispanic or Latino. African

Americans, Asians, Mixed Race, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, and American Indian and Alaskan Native residents combined make up approximately 13.17 percent of the total population. See Figure 1. The demographics of Salt Lake City mirror the student population in attendance at the University of Utah. The University of Utah, Office of Information and Analysis indicated that the university enrolls a significantly lower percentage of students of color compared to White students. During the time this study was conducted in 2006-2007, records showed that out of 28, 619 total students enrolled, 22, 519 were White students and 3, 097 identified as racial ethnic minorities (Office of Budget and Institutional Analysis 2007). See Figure 2 and 3.

One of the most shocking realizations I had in my first weeks as a student at the University of Utah is that I could walk around campus for several days and never see a single Black person or person of color. Although I had learned how to navigate predominantly White academic and social settings, the University of Utah was an extreme version. When I attended the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, I could walk through the quad located in the center of campus, and see African American, Latina/o, and Asian American students in the midst of mostly White students. The view of campus at the University of Utah consists of White mainstream people most all of the time. Although I was comfortable building relationships with White students, faculty, and staff, the relative absence of racial ethnic minorities on campus made me feel isolated and alone. I was often called upon to explain elements of Black culture that were unknown, misunderstood and devalued by people who had little to no contact with African Americans.

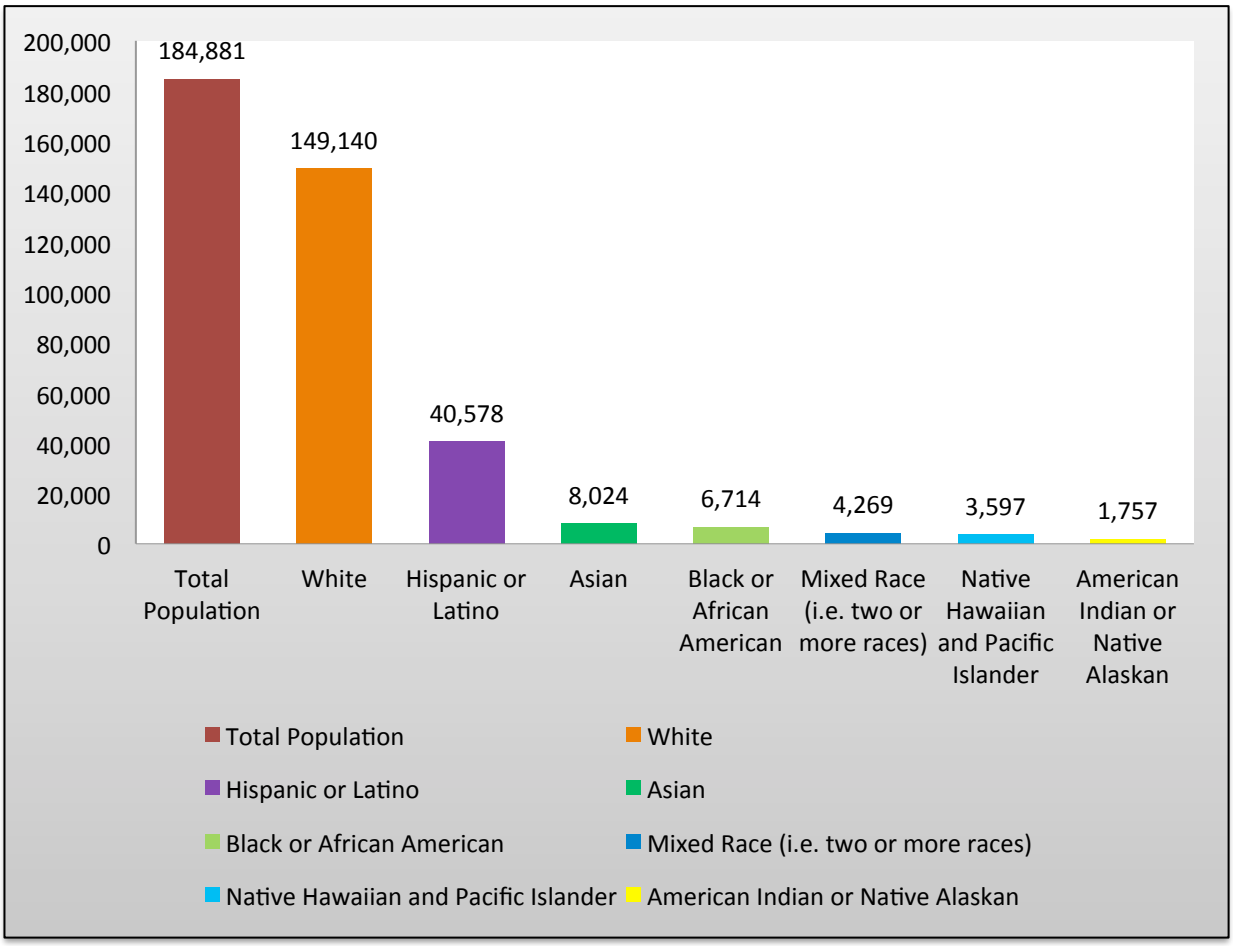

Figure 1. Population of Salt Lake City, Utah by Racial Ethnic Background

Even when the queries were posed politely and with an earnest desire to learn about Black culture, the lack of exposure, knowledge and appreciation for Black people, history and culture made me feel like a constant visitor from a strange land all nine years I attended the University of Utah. It is important to note that the demographics of the student population at the University of Utah are very similar to that of several other state universities in the Mountain West region. See Figure 4 to compare the racial demographics of state universities in the mountain west region.

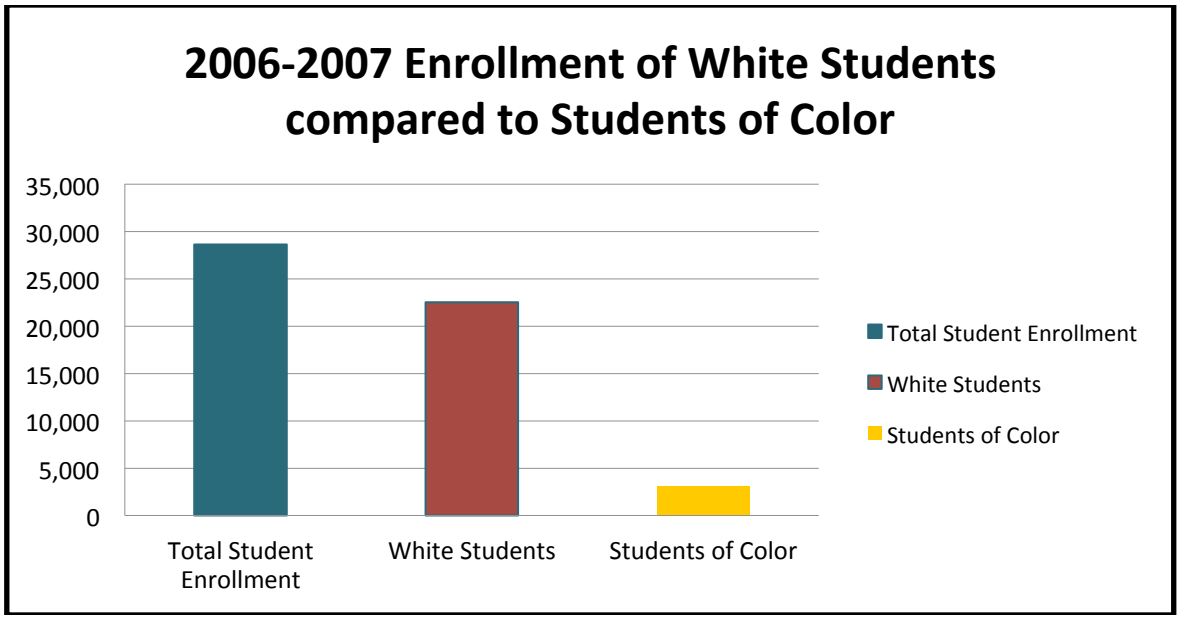

Figure 2. Enrollment of White Students Compared to Students of Color

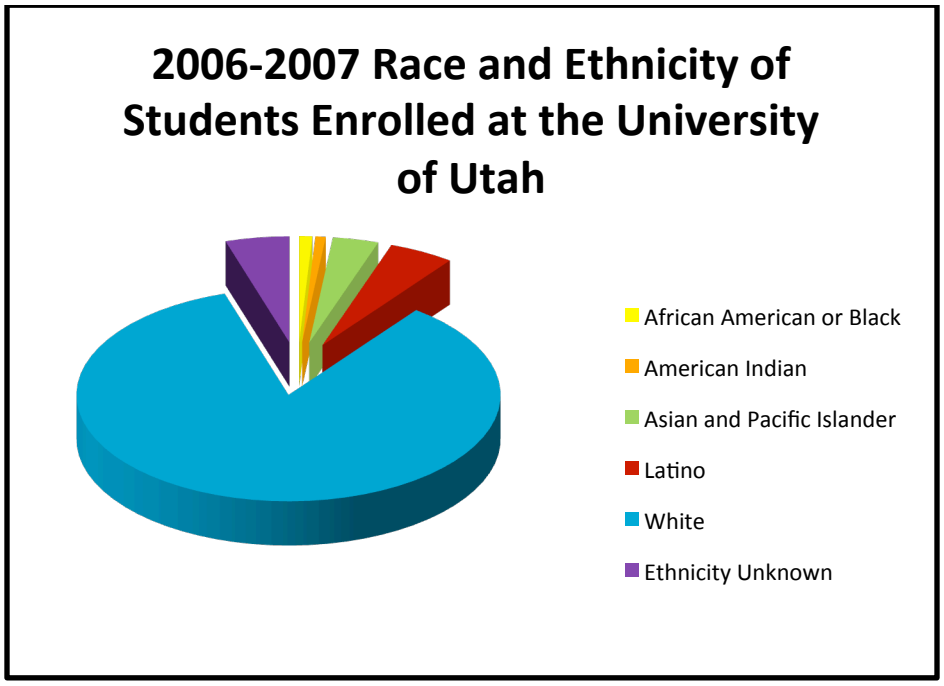

Figure 3. 2006-2007 Race and Ethnicity of Students Enrolled at the University of Utah

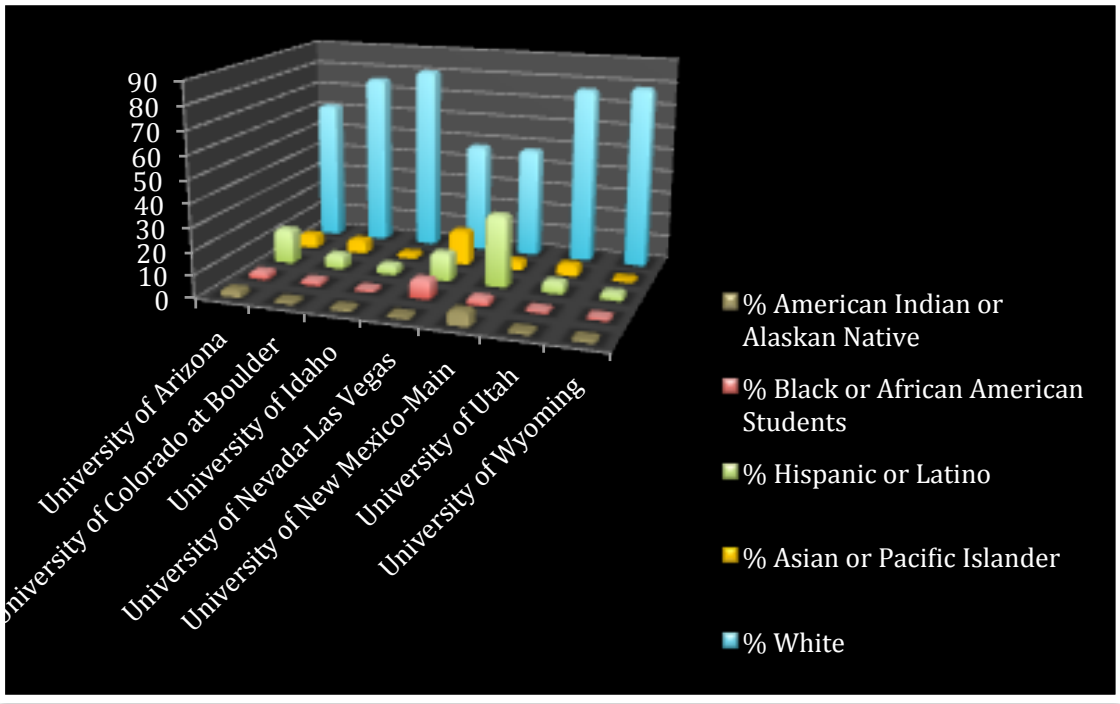

Figure 4. Racial Demographics of University Students Enrolled in Mountain West Region

The congruencies between the racial demographics of these mountain west universities are an indication that students of color at other major institutions may also be experiencing some of the same racial dynamics as students of color at the University of Utah.

In tandem with my studies, I worked at the University of Utah as an instructor for classes in multicultural education, developmental writing, and ethnic studies. On several occasions, White students told me that not only was I the only African American woman instructor they had ever had, but I was also the first Black person they had ever met. Several demonstrated disdain for my position of authority. Others observed me both curiously and cautiously as though I had stepped out of their television screen and into the classroom. White students' lack of exposure to

and experience with African American culture became a painful issue for me because they often made claims that African Americans and Latinos (who they referred to collectively as Mexicans) did not value education. It never seemed to register for White students that their negative stereotypes about African Americans and other people of color doubled as derogatory statements about me, my family, and my ancestors who sacrificed more than can be accounted for here to secure our civil right to public education.

The personal testimonies I presented above testify to the influential relationship between the large percentage of White students as compared to students of color, and the predominance of White mainstream culture as the campus culture. Students of color are in the minority both in terms of population and power. Caroline Sotello Viernes Turner (1994) described the status of students of color at a predominantly White campus as "guests in someone else's house." She elaborates on the metaphor:

> Like students of color in the university climate, guests have no history in the house they occupy. There are no photographs on the wall that reflect their image. Their paraphernalia, paintings, scents, and sounds do not appear in the house. There are many barriers for students who constantly occupy a guest status that keep them from doing their best work. (Turner 1994, 356)

According to the respondents in Turner's study that included faculty, staff and students from diverse racial ethnic minority backgrounds, racism that is overt and subtle, institutional and individual is an insidious barrier. Their guest status both precipitates and exacerbates racial incidents because the university as a whole feels no obligation to adapt policies, practices and campus culture to embrace those who are viewed as nonmembers. It is also important to note that when racist incidents

occur at a predominantly White university, it can be difficult for students of color to find support. The low number of students, faculty and staff of color mean that institutional and peer support may not be available. There is the additional factor that even if students of color have access to such individuals they may have differing, even oppositional views about race that will make them unable or unwilling to support students of color who are looking for ways to navigate racism. In confronting this phenomenon at the University of Utah, students of color in my study sought out support services, academic resources, and personal relationships to help them make sense of the racial hostility they experienced in classrooms. As a result of undergoing and overcoming such difficult experiences, these students developed a powerful insight and compassion that made them stand out both academically and socially. Similar to the respondents in Turner 1994, they often experienced a double bind:

> In addition to operating in a generally unsupportive environment themselves, they experienced the burden of being teachers to their teachers and mentors to other students of color. In other words, the people who are most important to maintaining and supporting at-risk undergraduate students are at risk themselves. (Turner 1994, 362)

Many of the same perils that students of color face on predominantly White campuses also apply to predominantly White classrooms. Although in classrooms the course curriculum is an added dimension because it tends to be oriented to a Eurocentric frame of reference.

When a classroom is referred to as 'predominantly White' it is a general description of the racial composition of the students and the professor. Technically speaking, a classroom is predominantly White if White students outnumber students

of color by at least one person. That being the case, the racial composition of college classrooms at the University of Utah can be characterized more accurately as overwhelmingly White. The students who participated in my study were often the only person of color in their classes. As undergraduates, their classes were often large lecture-style classes held in a small auditorium or hall. The average class size ranged from twenty upwards to seventy students overall. In this study, I use the term 'predominantly White' to indicate simply that ninety-three percent of students per class were White. No more than seven percent were students of color. Of that percentage it is important to note that students may visibly appear to be from a racial background other than White, but again, not all students of color claim their racial ethnic minority background. Visualize a college classroom of forty-five percent students. The probability is that only three students are students of color, and the three of them may or may not identify as a racial ethnic minority. This statistic reflects the university-wide ratio of racial ethnic minority students to White students. See Figure 1 and 2.

In explaining the roles that students of color are pressed into playing, it is important to note the miniscule number of students from racial ethnic minority backgrounds who are present in the classroom. This ratio has a significant impact on the classroom dynamics as related to race. State universities are institutions with a mandate to serve their surrounding communities. The overwhelming majority of White students and faculty at the University of Utah reinforces the legitimacy of adhering to a Eurocentric curriculum, and abiding by White norms of thinking and participating in the classroom. Therefore, I employ the term *White-dominated*

classrooms in an all-encompassing way that refers to a class in which approximately ninety-three percent of the students enrolled are White, the curriculum is constructed around the scholarship and viewpoints of White male academics and classroom norms are defined by Whiteness. As Pamela Perry (2008) noted White-dominated spaces have historically excluded people of color by definition if not by design.

Despite the fact that the participants in my study had chosen different major areas of study at the University of Utah, most all of their classes took place in White-dominated classrooms as I have described above. Being the only student of color in the room, or one of few, led not only to the phenomenon of being outnumbered but also the predicament of being over-powered. Students often used the term "singled-out" when talking about the isolating experiences they had in classrooms. The dominance of White students and White professors numerically, culturally and politically, positioned students of color in ways that served the educational needs of White classmates and the professor. In other instances they were stigmatized and alienated from social and academic endeavors.

Whiteness and White Students in Higher Education Contexts

There are a growing number of scholars who recognize that 'Whiteness' is an important unit of analysis when trying to understand how racism continues to plague students of color in higher education today. It can be considered the hidden construct that almost always accompanies the work of racism that is a reassertion of the dominance of Whites over people of color. There are different views as to exactly what is Whiteness. Various scholars refer to White identity as a performance

(Schueller 1999; Tehranian 2000), property (Harris 1992), or a space (Delaney 2002; Razack 2002). I find validity in each of these paradigms, but this study is not an examination of Whiteness. However, with the focus of my study being the reflections and interpretations of students of color about their interactions in White-dominated classrooms I think it is important that my analysis does not default into totalizing, essentialized categories that reduce all White students and professors to 'oppressors' and all students of color as 'the oppressed'. For the purpose of this study it is most useful to understand Whiteness as a discourse that is socially constructed and shapes the way our social identities are developed and expressed in particular social contexts (Roediger 1991; Frankenberg 1993; Giroux 1997). To put it simply, Whiteness can be thought of as a "constellation of ways of speaking, interacting, and thinking in which [Whites] gloss over issues of race, racism, and White supremacy in ways that reinforce the status quo" (Haviland 2008, 41). Whiteness works to privilege some people while marginalizing and oppressing others.

One example of Whiteness in action is the reaction of White students and students of color to a course on Women of Color taught by scholar-practitioners Hunter and Nettles. In this case the author-educators, themselves women of color, designed a course in which the curriculum was comprised of texts written by and about women of color and presented from the standpoint of women of color. Several students began to argue that the course was biased in favor of women of color and against White women despite the obvious fact that the course was about women of color. Not only did students eventually reject the course readings but they also

began to contest the institutional and intellectual authority of the professors. Whiteness is at play here in that students demanded that the curriculum return to a Eurocentric orientation. Furthermore, they corrected the professors as if to suggest that they were incompetent and unqualified to be teaching at the university level. This is a display of entitlement on the part of students who act as though it is justifiable and appropriate for them to interrogate the institutional and academic authority of the women of color professors. In this case, their sense of entitlement, a typical tactic of Whiteness, plays into the anti-affirmative action sentiment that has once again threatened to overtake U.S. campuses. Another cue indicating that Whiteness is at play is that students of color also participated in the contestation of Hunter and Nettles' course. This is an example of how Whiteness is not automatically identity-based but a social construct in which an individual from any racial ethnic background can become invested.

Whiteness in K-12 and Higher Education Contexts: A Comparison

Universities and colleges are often looked upon as institutions in which liberalism reigns supreme. Higher education settings tend to be subjected to the kinds of restrictions and mandates that do not necessarily dictate the classroom experience. For this reason Whiteness has a greater chance of emerging as the status quo even while higher education is a site that holds the greatest possibilities for disrupting Whiteness. Many studies proceed into discussions about Whiteness, racism and antiracism in classrooms leaving the reader to discern if the classrooms under examination are in higher education contexts or in the K-12 system. Clearly

there is a distinction between the two settings although it is more often an unstated assumption made between the author and the reader than an articulated discussion about why the fact matters. In this section, I make the effort to outline key differences between the two contexts because the participants in my study made it clear that their experiences with racism, diversity, and White-dominated classroom spaces were different in high school than in college. I will discuss participants' high school experiences in the upcoming section *Students of Color at the University of Utah*. For now I focus on my summation that Whiteness works differently in higher education contexts which typically rely on individuals to govern their own behavior according to cultural codes and social expectations as opposed to the institutional and legal policies of interaction which K-12 teachers are held responsible for enforcing.

Professors and students in higher education enjoy more freedom than do their counterparts in K-12 institutions. K-12 teachers often have their curriculum dictated to them by the school district according to state policies and mandates. Students are taught in a highly structured environment that tends to prioritize discipline and order over other social and academic concerns. The daily schedule for students and teachers is highly regimented in order to establish routine, provide stability and to promote learning goals. There is an absolute hierarchy between teachers and students. Teachers have authority and control, students have little to none and this is a nonnegotiable term of engagement. In K-12 schools, students are assigned to teachers and classes. They receive their schedules in the mail and must have a parent or guardian advocate on their behalf for their schedules to be changed. Studies show

that students of color are disproportionately placed in special education classes -- a phenomenon that can lead to predominantly White classes for mainstream students. In K-12 classrooms there are many issues that are not allowed topics of discussion, and the banning of books remains a common practice. According to the American Library Association Office of Intellectual Freedom great American novels such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Twain 1912*)*, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee 1960*)*, *The Color Purple* (Walker 1982), and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (Angelou 1969) are a few of the most banned or challenged books in public school districts around the nation today.

Professors and students in higher education contexts are granted a lot more freedom than their K-12 counterparts although this is coupled with its own set of responsibilities and expectations. For example, professors have the autonomy to choose how to design the curriculum for the courses they teach. They are expected to select texts and topics that fall within the standards and scope of their respective disciplines. Professors are also free to use various teaching styles to convey course material. Since students in higher education are usually eighteen years old or older, they are treated as adults. This means that professors are not expected to learn strategies for maintaining discipline and order among students. Students are expected to have a handle on their own behavior and conduct themselves in a respectable and respectful manner. Students are also allowed to choose their own major area of study, classes, and professors within a wide range of options. Aside from a subset of developmental classes, students are not grouped by ability. This factor alone increases the potential for classes to have an enrollment of students from

diverse racial ethnic backgrounds. Under the rubrics of academic and intellectual freedom, dialogue can at times include subjects that are considered controversial. Such discussion is to be handled with collegiality and professionalism.

The differences between K-12 school contexts and higher education are much more complex than I have presented in this brief discussion. However, the primary purpose of this section is to illuminate this single irony: It is easy to point to the ways in which external restrictions and mandates are imposed on K-12 teachers and students, and how many of these structures reproduce Whiteness. At the same time, the absence of such restrictions in higher education does not make college classrooms any less vulnerable to the reassertion of the supremacy of Whiteness. University and college professors have the freedom to configure course material in ways that represent multiple, even diverging viewpoints on race-related issues. Yet, they frequently adhere to a Eurocentric curriculum and traditional lecture teaching styles. Carol Schick writes about the roots of academic culture in Whiteness, "…discourses in this university space function in ways that privilege Whiteness, so that Whiteness persists as what is worth knowing and as an identification worth performing" (Schick 2002, 101), The fusion of Whiteness with academic culture often means that academic success carries with it an unspoken contract that students must adopt the values of White mainstream culture. Some students of color may find this an acceptable bargain well worth the benefits. Other students of color may find this a Faustian bargain because assimilating to White culture would require them to internalize negative racial stereotypes and accept racial positioning that dehumanizes and oppresses them. These same students may struggle to separate the goal of

academic success with assimilation into White mainstream culture. A more rich and complex discussion of this phenomenon can be found in the research of Signithia Fordham (1996).

Theoretically, students enter higher education institutions on equal ground with one another. They are not ability grouped, tracked, nor does their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) file from middle school follow them to college. Still, students of color continue to struggle to gain access to college, and once there struggle against statistics that declare that it is unlikely they will make it to their second year. College classrooms usually require that students participate in class but how they choose to participate and the content of their remarks is left to the student to decide. Even with this degree of openness, White students often become defensive when race-related issues are raised in class.

Higher education is a setting in which Whiteness can be identified quite clearly. Academic culture, disciplinary knowledge, and norms of behavior all tend to be oriented to Whiteness. Additionally, students are in effect rewarded based on the extent to which they assimilate and uphold the standards of Whiteness in higher education. Whiteness is a standard in which White mainstream and people of color can both be invested in maintaining. Carol Schick (2002) noted in her own study that some racial ethnic minority college students were eager to fit in to academic culture precisely because their culture was not applicable as currency towards gaining admittance, acceptance or achievement in their academic departments. Schick further explains how academia awards those students willing to assimilate:

> Participants are very interested in associating themselves with the university; they look to it for the legitimating function it offers those who do not

> necessarily come from the ranks of the social elite. In exchange, the speed with which participants are able to comply with the normative values and requirements determines how well they are prepared to "fit in" with university life and performance. (Schick 2002, 111)

The benefits of professors and students of color assimilating to Whiteness in academia is that their scholarship may be seen as colorblind, bias-free and legitimate, i.e., untainted by racialized perspectives and concerns of any kind. Students of color may benefit from being invested in Whiteness because it may help them avoid the stigma and ostracization faced by students who challenge Whiteness openly. Whiteness in higher education has institutional, interpersonal and political impacts on the everyday lives of students and professors in White-dominated universities and classrooms. In the next section I will provide more detail about the politics and practices of engagement for White students in White-dominated classrooms.

White Students in White-Dominated College Classrooms

The dominant status of White students in predominantly White classrooms can provide individual White students with a sense of entitlement. They begin to take ownership of the class. From their perspective this may seem appropriate in light of the fact that students of color are granted the marginal status of guest. In such a position, White students feel free to voice their disapproval and disdain for class proceedings, particularly when they evolve to address issues of race and racism. On occasions when there is a student of color in the class, White students have also been known to question the legitimacy of their [students of colors'] presence.

It is understandable and perhaps to be expected that students will find it difficult to talk about race and racism in the college classroom. After all, it is a matter that most communities, governments and nations struggle to address or even acknowledge. College classrooms are often considered one of the last bastions of open dialogue and intellectual freedom. However, the challenges of talking about race-related issues persevere in higher education contexts as well. Therefore, it is no surprise when White students become defensive against dialoguing about race. This is especially the case for predominantly White classrooms because "diversity" issues are often viewed as a concern belonging exclusively to people of color. When there are only one or few students of color in class it is easy for White students to draw the conclusion that race is a nonissue for the majority of students, and majority interests should prevail. At first this contention may manifest as an intellectual or epistemological problem that can be resolved by educating White students about the history and politics of race with an emphasis on 'Whiteness' as "a system and ideology of White dominance and superiority that …ensures existing privileges for White people in the United States" (McIntyre 2002, 31). However, it is during the process of instruction that White students begin to enact other forms of defensiveness that are equally troubling. There are various scholarly accounts of White students' defensiveness towards learning about race-related issues (Sleeter 1993; Razack 1998; Boler 2000), their resentment towards professors who teach about race-related issues (Srivastava 1997; Baszile 2008), and their outright refusal to acknowledge it as a topic of value – to them and other members of society.

For example, White students' defensiveness is the object of analysis for two women faculty of color who critically examined incidents that unfolded in their college-level course entitled Women of Color. They deliberately designed the course as a departure from the university's Eurocentric orientation to curricula by establishing women of color, race and gender issues as the organizing themes. This pedagogical project was made transparent to the seventy-five students who enrolled in the class, and notably approximately half the students in the class were Women Studies majors and women of color. In the beginning, Hunter and Nettles (1999) found that White students disputed the validity of course readings. They [White students] began to express skepticism about both professors' scholasticism. The authors reported:

> Throughout the course, students interrupted the lectures to assert their own knowledge of the subject matter and attempted to correct us. … Students were extremely disgruntled over not having enough comments on their essay midterm examinations. Despite the fact that large public universities have large classes and it is common for professors to write only a few comments on exams, they expressed their dissatisfaction with vigor and anger. (Hunter and Nettles 1999, 392)

According to Hunter and Nettles, students offered this criticism of the overall course:

> Indeed, many of our students complained that before they entered this course they were in a "liberatory" state of colorblindness where they did not think about racial differences. However, upon entering this course, they report feeling "dragged down" into a state of race or color consciousness that they perceive as undesirable. (Hunter and Nettles 1999, 392)

In this case, Hunter and Nettles' class was predominantly White by only a small margin, but they noted that the overwhelming majority of students were invested in Whiteness, including some students of color. These occurrences in which White students and students invested in Whiteness go beyond a healthy debate of ideas in

order to argue the academic authority of texts written by women of color and the women professors of color who teach them are echoed at the University of Utah. Students' defensiveness of Whiteness seriously hinders the process of teaching and learning about race-related issues. It also creates an atmosphere in which talking about race is not only contentious, but seen by White students as a direct threat to the racially harmonious state within which they see themselves existing.

Many White students wield racial attitudes that are blind to White privilege, naïve to racial politics, and in denial about the impact of racism on people's everyday lives. They often enter into spaces where there are students of color (e.g., Center for Ethnic Student Affairs) or in which racial equity is the designated topic (e.g., multicultural education classroom), with the attitude that racism is an 'event' that took place in the past or that they have already "done the diversity thing." For many White mainstream students, there is nothing new or imperative for them to learn about racial diversity. This stance of racial innocence held by White students has stemmed in part from their sense of not having a culture. By treating culture as something that "other people" possess, White students have distanced themselves from the negative implications of their racial beliefs and the painful impact of their remarks.

White students have also expressed skepticism and resentment towards the presence of students of color in college classrooms. In these cases, students of color are accused by White students of having been admitted into the university through affirmative action policies. Some White students view diversity scholarships as an affirmative action measure that gives race-based preferential treatment to students of

color whose academic record does not qualify them to be admitted into the university. Catalina, a Latina student who participated in my study explained one such encounter she had with a White student:

> I took a multicultural education class…and it was a really White dominant class. There were three Latinas, an American Indian, and I think two Latinos. … this one girl raised her hand and said, "I just can't understand why on applications people can get more if they're a person of color." Well I don't think she said it like that, she said it more negatively. But I don't know, and the teacher was like, "this is a good point". So there are assumptions that people make, but she didn't really address the underlying thought that students of color get more scholarships, so I had to raise my hand and say, "you know, only ninety-six percent of scholarships, or sorry, ninety-six percent of scholarships go to White students, whereas three to four percent go to students of color."

In this situation, Catalina used statistics to prove that it is mostly White students who are awarded scholarships, whereas most students of color attending the university are not supported by scholarships at all. Ultimately, she tried to debunk the fundamental belief that students of color do not deserve to be students in the classroom or members of the campus community. Margolis and Romero (1998) point out that White students, faculty and staff stigmatize students of color by accusing them of having been admitted into an academic program through affirmative action policies. In their investigation of the hidden curriculum for graduate students in sociology departments, one respondent stated:

> Coming in as a woman of color – there was always the stigma that you were an affirmative action student; that you got in because they LET you in, that you did not GET in…like this is OUR Indian student. And…even some of the secretaries and some of the other people would refer to me as OUR Indian student. I remember one guy coming up to me about my second year. He said, "Geez, so you must be the affirmative action case." I said, "What the hell do you mean?" I happen to have seen his transcript from Princeton, which was a C- or a C transcript. My transcript was an A transcript. So I just said, "No. As a matter of fact, my transcript is better than some of yours [White students].

Using a strategy similar to Catalina's, this Native American graduate student was able to wield factual evidence against the White student's attempt to call her academic record into question. However, students of color are not always armed with data that will help them ward off racial stigmatization. When White students perceive students of color as having an unearned privilege just by being a racial ethnic minority, it makes the open exchange of ideas by equals an unrealistic goal. Racial tensions are activated for White students by the mere presence of students of color in the classroom. Discussing race-related issues adds fuel to an already raging fire. White students' defensiveness towards students of color and learning about race in the college classroom is in stark contrast to students of color, many of whom crave knowledge about racial ethnic minority groups, and racial politics in the U.S. and abroad.

Students of Color at the University of Utah

A discussion about students of color in White-dominated classrooms is the crux of this entire dissertation. Each chapter is an elaboration on what I view to be pivotal issues in developing an understanding about the racial subjugation students of color face, and how they navigate their way to self-defined notions of educational success and empowerment. Yet, before I discuss the findings of my research, it is important to provide a general sense of how students of color contributed to the social and academic setting in which this study is based. The description I provide below is focused on those students who participated in this study and their peers who also claimed a racially minoritized identity. Oftentimes they enrolled in classes with

one another, participated in student and community organizations, and looked to one another for emotional, academic and social support. I had the opportunity to meet and interact with many of these students over a five-year period during my initial pilot study, throughout the data collection phase, and afterwards through the various professional roles I held on campus as an instructor and an academic advisor for the Center for Ethnic Student Affairs.

The students who participated in my study were involved in an informal network of students from various racial, ethnic backgrounds including African American, Asian American, Chicana/o, Native American, and Pacific Islander. Not only did students hold strong affiliations with their respective racial ethnic groups, but they also built relationships across racial lines among other students of color. This was evident when I observed them as they studied in the Center for Ethnic Student Affairs student lounge, ate lunch in the student union cafeteria, and participated in the Diversity Board. The Diversity Board is a branch of the student governing body at the University of Utah. Every year the incoming student-body president and vice president appoint a director for the Diversity Board. The director then appoints three associate directors. Membership is voluntary and open to all students. The Diversity Board is responsible for coordinating initiatives and campus programming that promotes multiculturalism. For the past three years, the Diversity Board leadership has consisted of students who have also participated in my study. They reframed the superficial multicultural objectives to develop social justice education initiatives. Their events have been successfully coordinated, well

organized, well attended, and have featured speakers such as Peggy McIntosh and Gloria Ladson Billings.

I also noticed their participation in both single-race groups and cross-racial groups when students introduced me to their friends in an effort to help me recruit participants for my study. In interview sessions, students frequently referred to students from racial ethnic backgrounds other than their own as key support people. For example, Arianna, a Chicana student, considered Joaquin, a Mexican American and Navajo student and Midwin, an African American student as two of her closest friends and allies on campus. At the same time, there were also conflicts and tensions among students of color – within their respective racial groups and across racial lines. However, one of the unifying factors for many students of color lay in the racially charged experiences they had in their classes. In these cases, White students, White faculty, and students of color invested in Whiteness were often the culprits.

These students of color came to the University of Utah from a variety of high schools. Their high schools were private with a religious affiliation, public in predominantly White and wealthy neighborhoods, and public high schools in communities where racial ethnic minorities were in the majority. Whichever type of high school they attended, students indicated that neither type prepared them for the racial dynamics they faced at the University of Utah. Students who attended predominantly White high schools told me that they functioned under the veneer of colorblindness to avoid conflict with White classmates, or else were oblivious to racial dynamics due to the exceptionalism granted to them as student athletes

encouraged to be "above it all." In racially diverse high schools, students may have faced racial issues but they were not White-centered. Most research participants agreed that the racial dynamics between White faculty, White students, and students of color at the University of Utah were a shock. Many students of color came to the university with no clear expectations or with the expectation that it would be a racially accepting environment. They may have also assumed that the same strategies they had relied upon in high school would help them navigate the university. To their surprise, the racial dynamics at the University of Utah signaled an awakening for them – personally, socially, and intellectually.

As students began to awaken their race consciousness they found that their academic and social world had altered dramatically, or else their perspective of it had changed. For example, Arianna began her first year at the university with one of her Latina friends from high school. They both had attended the same predominantly White private high school, and had achieved great success both academically and socially. However, Arianna began having race-related difficulties the first semester. Her outspokenness about racial issues soon made her a target for White defensiveness from White professors and classmates. In an effort to make sense of the racialized experiences she was having, Arianna tried to debrief with her Latina friend from high school. Arianna began to notice ideological tensions between them. Her friend did not even notice the racial dynamics Arianna was pointing out. She downplayed Arianna's experiences and accused Arianna of manufacturing conflict where there was none. Their friendship gradually dissolved. Arianna found other support people to help her make sense of her experiences, and later determined that

her friend was too invested in Whiteness to see from a subjugated perspective. Like Arianna, as students in this study began to develop a critical understanding of race, they made distinctions between those students of color who they referred to as "invested in Whiteness" and those who claimed a minoritized identity.

I met many of these students at various stages of their self-initiated quest to learn about their cultural heritage. The quest to learn about their personal racial histories and about the racial history of the U.S. and beyond was sparked by their awakening to the oppression of people of color, White privilege, and their own everyday struggles with racism on campus. As they stepped into a new understanding about race, they found that their intellectual insights were accompanied by difficult emotions. They critically examined the social dynamics and their racial survival strategies in high school. Some students became ashamed, depressed and enraged when recalling past situations in which they had allowed themselves to be victims and in other ways complicit in racism. The pivotal roles they played in their families often exposed them to racial injustices in society-at-large. They experienced first-hand how racial and language discrimination could prevent their parents and siblings from meeting their medical, housing and employment needs. This became a source of distress, fear, and resentment. In class they noticed that the experiences they were having as members of racial ethnic minority groups were often omitted from the curriculum or distorted. In an effort to build a strong sense of identity, protect themselves and their loved ones from harm, and compose responses to the racist remarks and assumptions espoused in their classes, students devoted themselves to the independent study of struggles for racial

pride and social justice. They read books such as *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* by Ronald Takaki, *A People's History of the U.S.* by Howard Zinn, and *Borderlands, La Frontera: the New Mestiza* by Gloria Anzaldua. Several students attended workshops facilitated by Lee Mun Wah on *How to Unlearn Racism* and *the Mindful Facilitation of Conflict*. Lee Mun Wah is a nationally-acclaimed lecturer and Master Diversity and Communications Trainer; Lee Mun Wah is a Chinese American community therapist, documentary filmmaker, Special Education educator, performing poet, Asian folk storyteller and author. He is also the Executive Director of Stir Fry Seminars and Consulting hired by corporations, government agencies, educational institutions, and social agencies to facilitate diversity issues through healthy and authentic cross cultural relationships.
In addition to training with Mun Wah, students of color also engaged in diversity initiatives on campus aimed towards building a public platform for voicing their concerns and educating the predominantly White student body.

Although their research and activism provided them with the intellectual and social supports they were seeking, it did not always assuage their angst towards White people and Whiteness in institutional settings. For example, one of my research participants, Zion, informed me that she was a Black nationalist who believed in racial separatism. She adopted this political stance to express her strong desire to distance herself from White people in hopes of protecting herself from ongoing racial encounters that left her hurt, angry and exhausted. When students juxtaposed their new knowledge against the racially hostile experiences they faced on campus, the realities of racism became amplified. Therefore, the combination of

White mainstream students who were defensive when learning about race and students of color who had been awakened to the injustices of race made college classrooms a minefield for racial conflict.

The University of Utah is a White-dominated institution like so many others across the nation. The low percentage of students of color enrolled at the university and the dominance of White mainstream norms produced a heightened sense of racial awareness for many students of color, and compelled them to become immersed in intensive socio-political studies. For White students the dominance of mainstream culture insulated them from the everyday realities of race, and imbued them with the false assurance that racism was not their issue. These racial dynamics unraveled in classrooms time and time again, entrapping students of color, White students, White faculty, and even faculty of color. No one in the classroom had immunity from the racial politics at the University of Utah.

CHAPTER 2

UNDERSTANDING PERSPECTIVES ON RACE IN WHITE-DOMINATED COLLEGE CLASSROOMS

The 1954 U.S. Supreme Court Case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* overturned the laws of racial segregation and declared that public schools must provide equal educational opportunities for African American children. While this decision had a profound impact on preparing students from racial ethnic minority backgrounds to attend colleges and universities (Allen 1992), fifty-five years later, racial issues continue to plague institutions of higher education. More students of color are pursuing higher education, yet they, like their predecessors, must still contend with *racial stereotyping* (Steele 1997; Howard 2008), a *lack of institutional support* (Turner et al. 1996; McCormack 1998; Madkins and Mitchell 2000), and *struggles for cultural inclusivity* (Slattery 2006; Wynne 2007). There are colleges and universities that are geared towards serving special populations of students in a culturally responsive environment. For example, Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia was founded in 1867 with a mission to serve African American men. It is a highly regarded historically Black institution. California State San Bernadino University has an enrollment of approximately fifty percent Latino undergraduates earning it the official designation of a Latino-serving institution. According to the Higher Education Act of 1965, Title V guidelines, a college or university that has enrolled a minimum of twenty-five to fifty percent undergraduate students of Latino

background can be identified as a Latino- or Hispanic-serving institution. Nonetheless, the majority of students of color attend predominantly and historically White colleges and universities.

Educational researchers have produced extensive documentation on the ongoing barriers faced by racial ethnic minority students in predominantly White institutions (Astin 1982; Allen 1992; Smith; Dixson and Rousseau 2006). These studies have described the racial landscape that students of color must traverse in order to fulfill their educational goals. This literature provides administrators with important policy recommendations for achieving equity (Pewewardy and Frey 2004) and offers university staff best practices for working with racial ethnic minority students (Sedlacek 1999). However, one of the least addressed areas lies in understanding the social and educational experiences of students of color in predominantly White classrooms. Most studies tend to focus on the overall campus climate and pinpoint individual contributing factors. My study intentionally investigates college classrooms to learn more about the relational aspects of how students of color navigate the racial dynamics between themselves, White faculty and White students. I found that many students of color learned about racial subjugation by being racially subjugated in the classroom. My aim is to discuss students' reflections on how they experienced White-dominated classrooms, their strategies for protecting themselves from subjugation, and their emergent self-defined notions of education and empowerment.

Race and power are constantly intertwined and get played out in college classrooms. Even if instructors and students choose to avoid or ignore racial

dynamics, educational researchers seeking to build antiracist learning environments for students of color must pay attention to them. Everyday students negotiate the irony that they are expected to be independently motivated and self-governing in the campus community at-large, but have notably little authority when it comes to classrooms. At the same time, they are held to predetermined standards of classroom participation. If students are uncomfortable with the racial dynamics they encounter when eating meals in the student union, sharing common space in a dorm room, or pledging a Greek organization, they have the option to make alternative arrangements or withdraw from participation. Conversely, by registering for a class, students enter an unspoken contract to meet regularly at a place and time designated by the administration, to study a topic defined by the professor, and participate in the educational process with classmates they have no control over choosing. Thus, it is imperative that the racial dynamics in classrooms are carefully examined because they are susceptible to becoming the kinds of barriers that students of color cannot bypass without jeopardizing their academic goals.

Many scholars have examined students of color in predominantly White universities and colleges (Allen 1992; Feagin 1996; Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso 2000; Lesage et al. 2002; Smith, Altbach, and Lomotey 2002). Occasionally, these studies make reference to classroom-specific data and report findings in a subsection or a single chapter. For the most part, this literature addresses racial equity in higher education by taking a broad view of the campus racial climate (Hurtado 1992; Cabrera et al. 1999). I examine a subset of scholarly work that focuses primarily on the effects of race and racism on students of color in predominantly White

classrooms. My objective is to illuminate the major developments and limitations in understanding the racial barriers students of color face, and the resulting social and academic outcomes (i.e., retention and academic performance). The definition of the problem, methodology, ideology, assessment and recommendations for change are significantly shaped by the author's explanations of how race works. Therefore, I have organized the literature into three major categories according to the way in which race is conceptualized. I posit that particular notions of race go further than others to provide a comprehensive understanding of how racial dynamics shape the social and educational experiences of students of color in White-dominated classrooms.

Perceptions, Individual Racism and Classroom Interactions

Some scholars seeking to understand the relationship between race and classroom participation have focused their inquiries on individuals. In their research, race is a variable treated as a biological descriptor (Mevorach 2007) that provides objective information about the human subject under investigation or it is addressed through the concept of individual racism. This literature often reaches the conclusion that "being a minority was associated with negative perceptions of institutional diversity" (Wong et al. 2008). Scholars using this framework have sought to determine the extent to which racial ethnic background influences students' perceptions of differential treatment by White professors and students in class. Such studies are important because they begin to suggest that race matters in classroom interactions. However, they do so by implying that a person's racial background

determines and sometimes distorts their perspectives on race. Scholars in this field problematize an individual's ability to discern reality and condemn individual forms of racism. While individual forms of racism are barriers with which students of color must constantly contend, they are only one aspect of the overall dynamics that make college classrooms racially hostile.

Many of these studies were motivated by a concern over low rates of participation and retention for students of color at predominantly White colleges and universities (Cabrera et al. 1999). Investigations led some researchers to conduct large-scale quantitative studies in an effort to uncover the reasons why students of color were not performing well academically as compared to their White peers. A significant number of the students of color interviewed indicated that they were experiencing some degree of alienation as a result of racial prejudice and discrimination. Scholars began to question whether or not these factors could account for differences in educational achievement between students of color and their White classmates.

Tracey and Sedlacek (1985) deduced that racist experiences and other non-cognitive factors such as self-esteem and coping strategies were more important predictors of academic performance than were intellectual ability and study habits. Researchers began to concentrate on the degree to which a student felt 'alienated'. Alienation and a sense of belongingness were used to determine how well a student adjusted to campus life, and eventually began to take into consideration the role that racial prejudice played in that process. In general, alienation came to be defined as a minority student's "noninvolvement with or estrangement from the institution

brought on by a sense of meaninglessness and powerlessness (Cabrera et al. 1999). The reasons for a student's lack of participation and investment in academia were attributed to two main reasons, a cultural mismatch between the student and the university (Spady 1970; Tinto 1994), and a student's inability to cope with stress (Munoz 1986; Prillerman, Meyers, and Smedley 1989). Scholars advocating either paradigm recognized that enduring racial prejudice from faculty and peers were the kinds of experiences that prompted students of color to disengage from the academic experience. Indeed, student respondents who are intellectually capable, academically prepared, and deeply invested in their education continue to cite race-related social barriers as an obstacle.

Studies have shown that students from racial ethnic minority backgrounds, namely African American, Latino/a, and American Indian are more likely than their White counterparts to perceive that they are treated differently by White faculty and classmates because of their race. A study conducted by Marcus et al (2003) showed that African American students had a greater rate of reporting incidence of racial bias and a greater perception of the occurrence of racial bias than White students. Wong and Seago reported the following results:

> All students from diverse ethnocultural backgrounds, except Asian [and non-Latino Whites] had lower perceptions of institutional diversity. Minority students rated institutions lower in supporting diverse faculty, teaching about diversity, and being sensitive to people of their ethnic backgrounds. Furthermore, their study revealed that discrimination took place inside the classroom more frequently than outside of it. (Wong and Seago 2008, 193)

These findings coincide with Pewawardy and Frey's (2004) study in which American Indian students at a predominantly White university discussed their perception of racism on the campus and that races were viewed differently.

However, without qualitative descriptions of students' experiences of racial discrimination or the researcher's accounts of observed incidents, these studies have only been able to make claims about individual perception of racial prejudice, and recommend that further studies be conducted.

Booker attempts to extend the literature on alienation through her study that explored "African American students' perceptions of belongingness and connection to a predominantly White university by way of classroom participation" (Booker 2007, 178). Her aim was to allow students to respond in their own words through the use of open-ended survey questions. Overall, student respondents identified four thematic areas that influenced their experiences in the classroom -- instructional style, interpersonal interactions with faculty, affective states of connection and peer relationships. One African American woman student made the following statement to the researcher:

> I hate attending some classes because I feel out of place because I'm the only Black student. The professor told me he didn't care how I did. He also did not give me respect until he saw I could write. (Booker 2007, 184)

This statement reflects a common barrier encountered by minority students in college classrooms that is the pressure to prove that they are intelligent and otherwise academically capable of college-level work. Their sense of belonging is constantly disrupted by the task of disproving the stereotype that their racial background is synonymous with low intelligence levels and a lack of scholarly ability. Booker's research extends the perception-oriented literature by providing students' sentiments about their interactions with White professors and White students. Students revealed that the "fear of being put down" and "lack of trust" inhibited their development of

social and academic relationships in classrooms. Booker writes in her final analysis that "[African American] students did not view their classes as places where they were safe to express themselves, but rather felt censored" (Booker 2007, 183), and recommends that further research be done to investigate students' define the term belongingness. It is both revealing and disheartening to hear students' sentiments about the racial prejudice they encounter in college classrooms. However, Booker's study does not describe what racism looks like in the classroom or how these incidents unfold. This is especially important because students indicated that subtle racism, not physical violence or hate speech, is one of the most common forms that they face. It is also important to provide qualitative accounts of racism in class because most faculty and students will insist that they are liberal and well intended, not racist. Descriptions of racist encounters as described by students of color and researchers will call attention to the ways that an individual's best efforts to be antiracist can actually reproduce racism in the classroom. Furthermore, scholars have firmly established that there is a link between racial prejudice, social interactions in classrooms and academic performance. Yet, they have not fully explained how these factors influence one another and create educational barriers for students of color.

This literature provides a lot of quantitative evidence demonstrating that students from various racial ethnic minority backgrounds believe that racial prejudice has a negative impact on retention and full academic participation. It lays an important foundation by positing the strong connection between social interactions and academic performance. Undergraduate-level studies put a student's

intellectual capacity to the test, but clearly it is not just a cognitive process. Academic achievement requires a certain amount of interpersonal interaction. These studies show that the quality of that interaction is important, and students are more likely to be successful when relationships between themselves, White faculty and classmates are free from racial prejudice. Unfortunately, the strength of this literature in pinpointing the problem of race and individual racism is also the source of its limitation in accounting for racially hostile college classrooms.

Racial prejudice is a barrier to students of color in college classrooms, but it is not the only form of racism with which to contend. Thinking about race as a problem of perception and individual racism assumes there is a direct correlation between racial background and race consciousness. In other words, White professors are racist and students of color are victims of racism. This binary does not hold true in cases where students of color are invested in Whiteness. Students of color are not a homogenous group. Not only do they have different racial ethnic backgrounds but also they may have distinctly different views about race (Hunter and Nettles 1999). Conversely, it is possible for a White professor to recognize racial tensions and his or her complicity in them (Bailey 1999). This literature offers a narrow understanding about how race works in the college classroom by reducing race to a biological descriptor that distorts one's views or as determinant of a person's racial socialization. Racism is not a delusion or simply a problem of faulty programming in an individual's upbringing. It is a much more complex and fluid phenomenon that is embedded in our consciousness, woven into our social surroundings, and is constantly reproduced in our words, actions and thoughts. Institutional contexts such

as classrooms, while typically viewed as race-neutral zones, are actually ideal sites for investigating how race works. However, the resulting analysis will depend greatly on how race is conceptualized.

Institutional Racism in College Classrooms

Some scholars recognize that individual racism often takes place in social contexts that are already organized into a racial hierarchy. In their view, the classroom is a unique social environment that has a great deal of influence over a college student's social and academic experience. They examine issues related to students of color and academic involvement by studying college classrooms from a sociological perspective. This involves a focus on "how social status, role relationships, and structural inequalities affect individuals in a social context" (Hirschy and Wilson 2002). Scholars using this paradigm discuss racial issues in terms of institutional racism defined as a system of benefits for the dominant group and one of disempowerment for oppressed groups (Feagin, Vera, and Imani 1996; Henze, Lucas, and Scott 1998; Feagin 2006). In their perspective, predominantly White universities and colleges have not fully incorporated racial ethnic minority students into the campus community -- academically, socially, or by way of institutional support such as financial aid. While this lens brings the social and institutional context of classrooms into sharper focus, it falls short by suggesting that changing the culture of classrooms can eradicate racism, cultivate students' sense of belongingness, and increase retention rates. In fact, changing the content of what is taught in the classroom and the format of how it is taught often triggers White

student defensiveness – a pedagogical problem with which many faculty members struggle.

Examining the culture and structure of classrooms reveals that eurocentrism is the organizing principle. Courses within a program of study are strung together in a linear way, and classes are often conducted in a way that assumes that the professor is the ultimate authority and students are empty vessels. For students of color who may have a different cultural orientation to the acquisition of knowledge, the process of schooling can be alienating (Ladson-Billings 1994; Delpit 1995). For example, mainstream classrooms typically function on the principles of individualism in which a student is evaluated based on his or her individual efforts. Some students of color may have a more collective frame of reference that encourages them to work collaboratively towards academic success. A Native American student talks about how collective efforts are not only devalued but punished:

> Eventually I quit going to school because I couldn't handle it any more. Four or five of us, all Indian students taking a science class, studied together. We were all accused of cheating on the final. I wouldn't even go talk to the professor. I said, "This is it," and I dropped out. (Lesage et al. 2002)

One aspect of this situation is the cultural dissonance between the individual orientation of mainstream culture and the collective orientation of Native American students. Yet it is the cultural legitimacy and authority granted to White mainstream society and its purveyors that gives the professor power to penalize students for acting on their cultural orientations. As such, institutional racism is treated as a problem that can be remedied by instituting university policies that fully integrate the culture of racial ethnic minority students into every aspect of campus life. This includes encouraging faculty to adopt culturally-relevant pedagogy to accommodate

culturally different learning styles (Anderson 1988). The benefits of diversity-based policies are also extended to White students who show an improvement in educational outcomes when exposed to racially and ethnically diverse students and faculty, and multicultural education initiatives (Hurtado 2001).

Hirschy and Wilson (2002) posit that the classroom environment is a community setting, but one that functions hegemonically more than democratically. They examine how the social status of students and professors (i.e., gender, race, social class, etc.) meld with patterns of interaction between students, their peers and the professor. They take into consideration how asymmetrical power relations affect student learning. By power relations they refer to the professor's ultimate control and authority over what is taught in class, peer interactions, and the standards of participation. The student is not only expected to adhere to these rules, but is effectively evaluated by them. The authors write:

> Ways in which faculty exercise or share authority influence how students learn through pedagogical strategies, and they affect the classroom environment. With their authority, instructors can decide how to structure the class participants' interactions by reinforcing some behaviors and deterring others. (Hirschy and Wilson 2002, 87)

In this framework, the lens of 'individual perception' is traded for the realization that classrooms are not politically neutral and that a professor wields institutional power over students. Maria Mendoza is a Mexican American student who describes how the social dynamics of classrooms are affected by peer comments with racist under- and over-tones:

> In a political science class with four students of color out of about 130, a student said that Native Americans are genetically defective and tend toward alcoholism because it's in their genes. We four sat there looking at each other, "Did he just say what he said?" I was so mad, and the professor let it

> go and did not address it. I said, "I don't mean to interrupt your lecture, but this must be an ignorant class. You just let a student make a racist comment. It's wrong to let something go by that isn't true. Most people aren't educated when it comes to ethnic groups, so if students don't know any better and hear something like that, they're going to assume it's true." After that, as I'd walk into class, students would roll their eyes as if thinking, "There she comes, trying to cause more trouble. (Lesage et al. 2002)

Maria's remarks illuminate how the professor wields power by way of his or her teaching style. The professor effectively decides who will be censored and who will be empowered to speak. In this case, Maria's professor has sanctioned the speaking of racial stereotypes in class by not addressing the White student's statement that Native Americans are genetically predisposed to alcoholism. Maria's effort to disrupt a racist viewpoint in class resulted in her being ostracized by many of her White peers. This led to her feeling as though she was an unwelcomed presence in the classroom. The professor's institutional and cultural power to establish classroom norms of behavior made it difficult to present alternative information about racial ethnic groups.

Tuning into the role of power and social relationships in the process of education, some scholars argue that students have a disjointed experience of college because the structure of course enrollment does not allow them to build sustained and supportive relationships with their peers or professors. Responding to the proven impact of the professor's power and pedagogy on student persistence, Tinto proposes that the classroom be cultivated into an intentional community, a project that aims to, "Redefine students' learning experience by restructuring the classroom, altering faculty practice, and linking courses one to another so that students encounter learning as a shared rather than isolates experience" (Tinto 1997, 5).

Tinto's objective is to use the unique and potent classroom environment to help students build relationships that support each other's efforts to persist in college. Not only does this aim to change students' interactions with one another, but also to increase their investment in social participation and academic success. Tinto and his research team conducted a qualitative case study in which they observed and interviewed students from two-year and four-year institutions who had been coordinated into a learning cohort. One student who participated in the college classroom communities reported the following:

> You know, the more I talk to other people about our class stuff, the homework, the tests, the more I'm actually learning…and the more I learn not only about other people but also about the subject, because my brain is getting more, because I'm getting more involved with students. I'm getting more involved with the class even after class. (Tinto 1997, 18)

This student's remarks indicate that fundamentally changing the structure of classrooms to support sustained collaboration among a cohort of students and professors can enhance a sense of classroom belongingness and college persistence. Importantly, it also suggests that it is possible to meet students' social and academic needs "without having to sacrifice one in order to meet the other" (Tinto 1997, 19). For students of color with cultural learning styles and values that do not mirror those of White mainstream students and professors, college cohort-building is a hopeful approach to building relationships in the classroom that do not require them to abandon their cultural integrity to obtain academic success.

On the other hand, studies show that while cohort models do succeed at transforming college classrooms into learning communities, they have not yet mastered the aim of inclusion for racial ethnic minority students. This holds true

even for classroom cohort programs that are designed to address issues of race in both the curriculum and pedagogy. Other scholars found that the same research that supports the classroom cohort model also presents data that students who did not fit the demographic norm of the cohort group were marginalized (Agnew et al. 2008). By means of focus groups and surveys, the researchers collected testimony from faculty who reported that "students of color were often shunned or silenced in class discussions while White students, particularly females, dominated conversations" (Agnew et al. 2008, 23). One situation a respondent shared with the researcher involved a White female student who was frustrated with a Hmong student who chose not to speak up in class. The White female student felt that the Hmong student needed to defend what the White student believed to be Hmong cultural traditions as they were being discussed and allegedly misrepresented in class discussion. The White female student explained the situation to the researcher:

> Danica (female): A Hmong situation had come up, and you know, stereotyping the Hmong community and different things. I didn't make a connection with her even through the four semesters, because I felt so disconnected, you know, disconnected with her, because she didn't speak up, and she sat during the whole class while everyone said this…and even now when I see her I feel uncomfortable because I feel like she should have spoken up and said something. (Agnew et al. 2008, 27)

One of the purposes of the cohort classroom model is to build a sense of community among students so that they feel at ease discussing diversity-related and other academic issues. The assumption is that by restructuring the classroom pedagogy and giving students the opportunity to attend classes with one another over the duration of two or more years, students will develop relationships with one another that will increase their exposure to different ideas and build tolerance among

students of diverse backgrounds (Hurtado et al. 2002). Yet, as evident from the above quote, the White female student is imposing certain expectations of participation on the Hmong student, seemingly without consideration for why the Hmong student may have consciously chosen to refrain from speaking up in class.

Did the Hmong student's silence indicate that she was not offended by racial stereotyping or was she trying to avoid conflict? Did the Hmong student feel pressured to live up to the model minority myth projected onto many students of Asian descent? Within that myth Asian students are expected to be docile, obedient, and in accordance with the status quo. Perhaps the student did not have the mastery of language or did not feel empowered enough to critique the remarks of her peers and professors. My point in posing these questions is to suggest that there are numerous possible reasons for the Hmong student's silence. Yet, no steps were taken to facilitate a dialogue between the two students to uncover those reasons. It would appear that cultivating the classroom into a community still does not give students the ground to have difficult and complex discussions about race.

This research reminds us that programs of study can be restructured, teaching practices can be formed around alternative values, but relationships in the classroom cannot be legislated – especially cross-racial ones. Framing the racial barriers that students of color face in terms of institutional racism places more emphasis on the structural design of classrooms than on how relationships develop among students and the professor. One of the most important insights from this literature is that in eradicating racism from classrooms, pedagogy should be a major area of concern. It is clear that even when professors and students are unlearning racism and the

structure of classrooms is changed to promote alternative modes of interaction, professors still wield enormous amounts of power through their philosophical and instructional approach to teaching. Furthermore, when professors have tried to organize their pedagogy around antioppressive principles, White students have expressed anger, resentment, guilt and disrespect towards the teacher's authority. White students' defensiveness is often an effort to wrangle the curriculum and norms of behavior back towards the status quo of Whiteness. When White students are successful in controlling academic interests in the classroom then students of color are marginalized. The racial dynamics of pedagogy often overpower students of color on multiple levels.

Race Practices, Relationships and Pedagogy

The third approach to this topic gives careful consideration to how pedagogy plays into the racial dynamics of classroom interactions. Literature in this field conceptualizes race through the lens of poststructuralism. In this case, race is treated as a process that operates relationally through practices that transpire among individuals who perform racialized roles activated by their participation in particular social, institutional contexts. This literature focuses on how racial and pedagogical practices shape classroom interactions between professors and students. Rather than situating racial prejudice or the institutional setting as the problem, these scholars often pose the inquiry in the reverse by studying racism from the perspective of those subjugated by it (Roman 1993). This often entails focusing on the discourse of Whiteness, its production, normalization, and dominance in social situations.

Scholar-practitioners in this field weigh the successes and failures of their pedagogical interventions against their aim to empower students and promote antioppressive education. The candid and critical examination of their own praxis entails a description of intellectual, ideological, and social tensions among students. Ironically, instructors' testimonies reveal how their student-centered objectives frequently result in marginalizing students of color. The definition of a successful pedagogical intervention is referenced primarily through the desires of White professors and the needs of White students. These accounts are vital to understanding how pedagogical principles translate to praxis. However, it is used to contextualize the scholar-practitioner's pedagogical choices, as opposed to being studied for clues about to how racial dynamics unfold in classrooms to entrap students of color in subjugated roles.

For example, Boler (2000) discusses her efforts to use her institutional authority to disrupt ideological/discursive/subtle forms of racism. She points out that in the college classroom "all voices do not carry the same weight…different voices pay different prices for the words one chooses to utter" (Boler 2000, 321). Boler explores her concern for the way that students of color tend to get silenced or verbally attacked when class discussion turns to race issues. On the other hand, White students apparently feel free to speak offensively about racial ethnic minority groups. Boler takes ownership of her power and authority as the professor to develop a pedagogy that protects students of color from hate speech and holds White students accountable for their racially offensive remarks. Employing what she refers to as *affirmative action pedagogy*, Boler resolves to apprehend White students' racist

remarks despite the dominant belief that college classrooms are a last bastion of free speech and democratic exchange. Boler (2000, 321) defines *affirmative action pedagogy* as "a pedagogy that ensures critical analysis within higher education classrooms of any expression of racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, or sexism, for example. An affirmative active action pedagogy seeks to ensure that we bear witness to marginalized voices in our classrooms, even at the minor cost of limiting dominant voices."

Censuring student remarks remains a problematic solution for Boler who recognizes that there are students who are earnest in their desire to be open to worldviews different from their own, but not educated or experienced in how to discuss such issues. She writes:

> …a discussion of racism or homophobia cannot rely simply on rational exchange, but must delve into the deeply emotional investments and associations that surround perceptions of difference and ideologies. One is potentially faced with allowing one's world-views to be shattered, in itself a profoundly emotionally charged experience. (Boler 2000, 325)

By employing affirmative action pedagogy, Boler demonstrates an understanding of the politics of cross-racial interaction and dialogue in the classroom. As the professor she is endowed with institutional and authoritative power, and yet there are ways that students can wield power over one another and professors. However, White mainstream students and professors, in particular, are bolstered by dominant discourses that advantage members of White mainstream society and disadvantage racial ethnic minorities. Nonetheless, the fluidity of power and race continue to offer hope to members of marginalized groups by giving them a way to resist. Ironically, Boler's affirmative action pedagogy actually usurps the opportunity for students of

color to empower themselves by talking back to White classmates' racist remarks. In this way, the project to cultivate an antiracist classroom by silencing White students may have the effect of silencing students of color as well.

Boler's analysis is also a reminder that discussions about racism are difficult not just because discussants are likely to have opposing viewpoints, but also because the topic stirs emotions that can be difficult both to express and hear. In accord with the fundamental view that difficult emotions and tense relational dynamics emerge in cross-racial discussions about race, some scholars suggest pedagogical approaches that can accept the tensions and still move towards building a sense of cohesion among students and the professor. Ellsworth (1989), a critical feminist educator, planned her pedagogy carefully in accordance with the principles of critical pedagogy and antiracist education. The students enrolled in her course were a mixture of men and women from both the U.S. and international backgrounds, including Asian American, Chicano/a, Jewish, Puerto Rican, Anglo-European, Asian, African, Icelandic, and Canadian. Ellsworth's students reported the following litany of reactions to a critical pedagogy that was designed for their empowerment through dialogue:

> Things were not being said for a number of reasons. These included fear of being misunderstood and/or disclosing too much and becoming too vulnerable; memories of bad experiences in other contexts of speaking out; resentment that other oppressions (sexism, heterosexism, fat oppression, classism, anti-Semitism) were being marginalized in the name of addressing racism --- guilt for feeling such resentment; confusion about levels of trust and commitment surrounding those who were allies to another group's struggles; resentment by some students of color for feeling that they were expected to disclose "more" and once again take the burden of doing the pedagogic work of educating White students/professors about the consequences of White middle-class privilege; and resentment by White students for feeling that they had to prove they were not the enemy.

(Ellsworth 1989, 108)

Ellsworth concluded that it is the social historical contexts and relations of power that make it impossible for students to engage each other in dialogue from positions of equality.

As indicated by the above excerpt, there are constant power struggles between students in terms of whose voice gets to speak authoritatively and which oppressions will be most acknowledged. In the end, Ellsworth became convinced that her expertise, intentions, and adherence to the principles of critical pedagogy did not adequately equip her to guide students in their interactions with one another. In fact, she noticed that her own racial identity, "as an Anglo, middle-class professor," also contributed to the tense classroom dynamics. Ellsworth admits that she was not able to "unproblematically 'help' a student of color find her/his voice as a student of color" (1989, 101). Again, the project to empower all students, especially those from marginalized groups, backfires. Part of the problem lies in the critical educators' presumption that students of color have not yet found their voice and secondly, that critical White educators can give students of color the power to speak. This approach mimics traditional modes of instruction that position students as empty vessels as opposed to knowledge holders/producers. Gore problematizes the unreflexive use of the notion of 'empowerment' on the grounds that "when the agent of empowerment assumes to be already empowered, and so apart from those who are to be empowered, arrogance can underlie claims of 'what we can do for you'. Gore states quite frankly "it is not clear we can do anything" (Gore 1992, 63). Sometimes critical educators are able successful at censoring hate speech and exposing faulty

philosophical foundations. Other times, their antioppressive pedagogical interventions actually reproduce "patterns of relating to students and youth as Other" (Orner 1992), especially students of color who are already marginalized members of society.

One important contribution Ellsworth makes to the development of an understanding of the influence of pedagogy and race on classroom interactions is in positing a poststructural view of racism that moves away from static notions of power and race to illuminate the complexities of identity and difference. Rather than treating identity as fixed, monolithic, and complete, Ellsworth advocates for a stance that acknowledges identity as "unfinished, imperfect, limited in projecting the interests of 'one side' over others" (Ellsworth 1989, 97). In other words, students and instructors are understood as speaking partial narratives that emphasize certain social positions and political interests over others. This means that professors must resist building pedagogies based on their assumptions about students' identity, and students can only build respectful, working relationships by approaching one another with an epistemic humility. Therefore, class discussions about race should proceed from the students' and professor's willingness to discover what they do not know about each other's racial identifications. Ellsworth calls this the *pedagogy of the unknowable*.

Razack (1998) extends the poststructural discussion about race by examining racism as a relational interplay of power. Razack proceeds from a postcolonial feminist concern that the power relationship between the colonizer and the colonized is transposed onto college classrooms. Instead of devising a pedagogical

intervention that allows for the unknowable, Razack insists that the narratives spoken in the classroom provide us with known material and that once these racial discourses are revealed they must be interrogated (Razack 1998, 53). She states "how we know what we know is central to our political practice because it helps us to locate the inconsistencies, the cracks we might then use to empower ourselves" (Razack 1998, 95). Critiquing narratives of race, identity and power is an educational project that exposes how the scripts that we think, speak, and perform reenforce struggles between members of oppressed groups and dominant group members. While Razack's pedagogical intervention addresses discursive forms of racism, it fails to provide a framework by which professors and students would critique each other's racial narratives. This is a major problem not only because studies indicate that White students and students of color have different perceptions about racial treatment, but also their experience and conceptual understanding of race are often diametrically opposed. Razack's approach may actually expose students of color to the same criticisms they already receive from White professors and White students. It is not clear how classroom participants who already struggle to dialogue about race will be able to weather the task of interrogating each other's race narratives.

Diangelo's (2006) study offers a closer look at the dialogic struggles between Asian international students and White mainstream students. She confirmed the tendency for White students to dominate class discussion. She used a poststructural lens to examine how Whiteness is produced in college classrooms. The term Whiteness is used to recognize that there is a racial hierarchy within U.S. society in

which members of White mainstream groups hold an elevated position. Therefore, Whiteness refers to a set of cultural practices and processes that serve to reinforce White dominance. Scholars using this paradigm examine how people's speech patterns and daily behaviors activate larger systems of racial discourses (Roman 1993). Diangelo observed a college-level course on research methods in which Asian International students comprised fifty percent of the class in order to "analyze Whiteness as a process" (Diangelo 2006, 1983). The researcher organized her data collection around the following imperative:

> I am attentive to the group dynamics involved in its production – the unspoken, unmarked classroom norms and behavioral patterns that bolster advantageous social position of White students at the expense of students of color. (Diangelo 2006, 1985)

This approach gives us a way to contextualize White students' patterns of behavior so that we see them not as individual, random acts of racism, but as everyday practices that bolster dominant discourses about White privilege and the marginalization of racial ethnic minorities. After recording detailed descriptions of classroom exchanges, Diangelo reported that:

> Not once in three hours did any international students of color speak during class time, nor was any attempt made to bring them into the discussion. The Asian international students essentially played audience to the White American students. (Diangelo 2006, 1991)

It is important to note that this information is not a commentary on courtesy or collegiality, but a very real educational concern that the racial norms that privilege Whiteness marginalize students of color from classroom participation and from the overall learning process. Diangelo points out that those who speak in class claim the power to determine the course of class discussion, and thus control what topics get

discussed in class, what information is distributed, and whose learning needs are met (Diangelo 2006, 1992). While the theorization of Whiteness lends itself to abstract and sometimes obfuscated language, it can be an important analytical lens for understanding how racist norms can undermine the most liberal and inclusive intentions, even in a multiracial classroom. In this case, scholars who study the production of Whiteness offer insight into how White mainstream students contribute to the marginalization of students of color in college classrooms (Hernandez-Sheets 2000; McIntyre 2002; Mazzei 2006).

However, one of the problems with placing the theoretical focus on Whiteness is that it positions White students and White professors at the center of examination which perpetuates the marginalization of students of color in scholarship as well as in the classroom. Understanding the production of Whiteness and being able to identify White students and professors' race practices only indirectly offers insights into the experiences of racial ethnic minorities in classrooms. Hunter and Nettles (1999) addressed the issue of differential theoretical treatment in their analysis of racial politics in a women's studies classroom. These researchers make an important assertion about Whiteness -- that as a social construction White people are not the only ones who can be invested in it. Students of color can also be invested in Whiteness. Their study analyzes the behavior of both White students and students of color. However, they are careful to point out that the two groups have different orientations to Whiteness, and thus call for varying analytical approaches. Hunter and Nettles set out to teach a course called "Women of Color" using readings that were by and about women of color, and

teaching from their own standpoint as women of color. Although their paradigm was made transparent at the beginning of the course, these co-instructors were barraged by students' requests for readings by and about White women (Hunter and Nettles 1999, 385). However, not only did White students and "a significant number of students of color" reject the course readings and topic, but they also resisted the authority of Hunter and Nettles as the instructors. Students asserted that "women of color" as a topic was subjective, and that without the possibility of right or wrong answers, knowledge claims were reduced to personal opinions and stories (Hunter and Nettles 1999, 386). The authors describe one of the several situations that arose in class:

> Throughout the course, students interrupted the lectures to assert their own knowledge of the subject matter and attempted to correct us. This usually happened during lectures on theory, which is considered the more difficult and higher-status material. We interpret the students' assumption that they "had it right" and we "had it wrong" as their perception of a failed racial performance. A racial performance for African American instructors would have consisted of incompetency and acquiescence to challenges from White students. We did not perform this racial stereotype adequately, and students let us know by trying to reassert their own authority over ours as instructors through interruptions and corrections. (Hunter and Nettles 1999, 392)

These authors make reference to racial performances that implies that everyone in the classroom has a script written for someone of their racial background. This script upholds the racial hierarchy in which White students or Whiteness is granted authority and power, even when it comes to deciding how a course on women of color will be taught. As Diangelo (2006) indicated, the students who are allowed to dominate class discussion are ultimately granted the power to determine the curriculum and educational process for everyone. Despite the fact that the women professors of color held institutional authority, students invested in Whiteness were

able to determine the direction of the class by interrupting the instructors, rejecting instructor knowledge, and resisting instructor authority. These resistant students were disturbed that the instructors did not speak from the racial scripts that were expected of them, namely that class would be "oriented to Whiteness." Their resistance was an attempt to put the professors back on track with Whiteness.

Hunter and Nettles discussed Whiteness as a social construction because they recognized that White students were not the only ones invested in maintaining Whiteness. Some students of color engaged in resistance against the course topic and the professor's authority. Like White students, they also relied on colorblind ideologies to debunk the standpoint of the class. While the end result was the same, the authors surmised that the route to Whiteness was different for students of color than for White students. How does a racial ethnic minority student abandon his or her identity in order to pledge allegiance to Whiteness? In pondering this question, the authors applied an analysis to understanding students of colors' orientation to Whiteness grounded in W.E.B. DuBois' notion of double consciousness. DuBois theorized the dilemma of the American Negro as holding two irreconcilable worldviews – being the privileged American and the despised Black, in one racialized body. In 1903, he wrote:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, -- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body. (DuBois 1903, 8)

Hunter and Nettles came to the conclusion that the students of color in their class had abandoned their race consciousness and were only able or willing to see themselves

through the lens of Whiteness (Hunter and Nettles 1999, 390). As the authors put it, many students of color in their class "only had one half of the double consciousness" (Hunter and Nettles 1999, 390), perhaps because it is difficult to stand in opposition to White hegemony.

Jones (1999) explored the possibility of instructing students of color and White students in separate classrooms as a strategy to alleviate students of color from hegemonic encounters with White students. She is one of few scholars who questioned what value cross-racial dialogue holds for students of color (Jones 1999, 299). Jones turned a critical eye towards her own classroom and decided that she, as a White Pakeha woman, and her Maori colleague should separate the students along racial ethnic lines with White Pakeha students meeting one day and Maori/Pacific Islander students meeting on an alternate day. Students reflected on their experience through journal writing. White Pakeha students expressed hostility towards the division, while Maori/Pacific Islander students appreciated the experience. The following are comments made by three Maori/Pacific Islander women;

> Not realizing that we would be split up into cultural groups, I prepared myself to argue any point I felt at odds with, with anybody not of a brown skin tone, to enlighten them upon the cultural ideals, values, and beliefs that didn't correspond to their own. It was with audible relief when I realized we were dividing into cultural groups. Brown and White.
>
> I felt validated or even vindicated. Being in a class of Maori and Pacific Island students, I stopped feeling like I was the other. Instead I felt as though I had moved towards the center and stepped into the center where White people normally reside. It felt good.
>
> The different streams also allow Maori and Pacific Island women to identify the issues of feminism amongst their own, as too often the discussions are taken over by...Pakeha women. (Jones 1999, 302)

Two contrasting remarks from Pakeha students;

> It doesn't seem right. Could we not learn from each other? Wouldn't it be valuable to share our differences in experience?..It is different reading about it in books, or having it taught by teachers. It is better to hear it straight from the women who are having the experience. It is easier to relate to.
>
> Nothing can be changed unless "we" know and are aware of what needs to be changed. Behind closed doors doesn't help the process change. (Jones 1999, 302)

The students of color expressed relief at the separation because it kept them from having to defend themselves and their ethnic group from the negative racial stereotypes projected onto them by their White peers. Also important is the freedom they felt to dialogue in racially separate spaces. Maori/Pacific Islander women commented on how in the classroom comprised exclusively of their own racial ethnic group they were able to "move into the Center." This served as a very rare opportunity for them to pursue inquiry into their own culture and other issues important to their ethnic community in a sustained manner "as too often the discussions are taken over by Pakeha women" (Jones 1999, 302). Jones' study extends the literature on race, pedagogy and relationships in the classroom by considering what counts as antiracist education for students of color. However, it offers more insight into the difficulties that students of color have in relating to White students academically and socially in the college classroom. There is still a lack of information that describes what students of color experience educationally in racially hostile college classrooms.

This literature has clarified for me that the problems that racism poses for students of color in college classrooms must be examined on multiple levels, ranging from the individual, the institutional, and at the relational level in the classroom. While each approach alone makes significant contributions to conceptualizing racism

in the classroom, they offer more collectively than on their own. Combined these paradigms identify various forms of racism in college classrooms such as the lack of faculty of color, the absence of culturally responsive learning environs and teaching styles, and the politics of identity and difference that inform student peer and professor interactions. While these studies show without a doubt that racism remains an oppressive force that students of color must contend with on a daily basis, there is little to no discussion as to how racism impacts students' learning process. In most cases, students of color have been depicted as disgruntled, victimized, or on the verge of quitting college altogether. My study is interested in what other roles are available to students of color in racially hostile classrooms? How have they claimed these roles for themselves? What are they learning in racially hostile classrooms?

A Fourth Approach: A Black Feminist Perspective

In the next section, I will discuss how theoretical tools derived from Black Feminist Standpoint Theory, also referred to as Black Feminist Thought, extend discussions about students of color, predominantly White classrooms, and the dynamics of race. First, I explain how this framework conceptualizes race as a social construction. This notion of race speaks most insightfully to the experiences of students of color in my study who are enrolled in classes at a White-dominated institution. Rather than moving away from understanding race as individual, institutional or relational racism, Black Feminist Thought opens up the possibility of seeing how racism works on multiple levels to undermine productive social and academic relationships between students of color, White professors and White

students. The result is that students of color learn about racial subjugation by being racially subjugated. Black Feminist Thought places a high importance on knowledge and consciousness, and therefore helps me to discuss how students of color develop themselves into knowledge-holders/producers by transforming their subjugation in racially-hostile classrooms into an educational experience, albeit a painful one. Finally, I will elaborate on how this paradigm addresses the centrality of knowledge to empowerment, particularly the oppositional knowledge of oppressed groups. It also recognizes students' agency in claiming a critical education to resist subjugation and empower themselves, and helps me to explore the educational implications for students of color who are subjected to racially hostile classrooms.

The Social Construction of Race

One of the fundamental aspects of Black Feminist Thought is the understanding of race as a social construction. Incorporating this view is an important departure from other studies about students of color, predominantly White classrooms and the significance of race. Explanations for low retention rates and poor academic achievement have pivoted on notions of race that make only a limited analysis available. When race is discussed as a biological descriptor the tendency is to find fault with an individual's perception that racism operates in the liberal environment of college classrooms (Schulze and Tomal 2006). This reenforces a false binary between White teachers who are racist and teachers of color who are not (Booker 2007). Conceptualizing racism as a cultural conflict leads to recommendations for adapting institutional policies that, in the end, do not eradicate

racism at all (Hurtado 2001; Hirschy and Wilson 2002). As for those cases in which poststructural notions of race are operationalized, racism is deconstructed at such a micro-level that the only way to address it is to resolve oneself to the unknowability of racial positions (Ellsworth 1989) or design a pedagogy that will move White professors' and White students' towards an antiracist consciousness (McIntyre 2002).

An example of the cultural application is Tinto's work to promote increased retention rates for students of color and other at-risk groups. Tinto lobbies for the careful grouping of students into multicultural cohorts to help them foster a sense of belonging through connecting with one another academically and socially. Tinto's model equates a collaborative, culturally relevant approach to academic achievement. However, student respondents indicate that tensions, misunderstandings and divisions along racial lines consistently emerge as barriers to meaningful, enduring cross-racial peer relationships (Tinto 1997). Cross-cultural groupings may compel students to reconsider self-segregation along racial, ethnic lines (Solórzano and Villalpando 1998), but it does not resolve the tensions that result from individual, institutional, and societal racism. Cultural-conflict based explanations fall short when juxtaposed against theories of social construction because race and culture are concepts distinct from one another. The analyses that equate low college retention rates to cultural incongruity do not go far enough to illuminate the racial barriers that students of color face in predominantly White classrooms.

Examining race as a social construction locates the problem of racism at the level of material/social reality and at the level of ideology/consciousness. It points to a historical understanding of the ways in which race has been assigned both rank and meaning primarily by members of the ruling class. Science has proven that human beings are comprised of approximately ninety-nine percent of the same biological, genetic material (Littlefield, Lieberman, and Reynolds 1982). There are no inherent biological differences between people of different racial groups beyond the physical expression of phenotype, nor are racial groups genetically predisposed to being in conflict with one another (Smedley and Smedley 2005). On the other hand, culture has a myriad of definitions, commonly thought of as "common historical experiences and cultural codes" which unify people into one frame of reference that is at once enduring and constantly undergoing transformation (Hall 1990). Racial groups are categorizations for humanity that denote specific status rank to members of different racial groups. Beliefs about the inferiority and superiority of racial groups are reinforced by differential and unequal treatment at an individual, institutional and societal level. In turn, racial inferiority and superiority become embedded in human consciousness and although the particularities of racial beliefs may change over time, the racial hierarchy remains relatively stable. In most societies those with the darkest skin are assigned to the lowest rungs while White-skinned individuals define the upper echelon. Georgia Warnke gives an example of this racialization process:

> First it involves the exercise of power. In the case of the Black race, this exercise includes the conquest and colonization of Africa, the Atlantic slave trade, the institutions of slavery and segregation, determinations of Whiteness by federal courts for purposes of naturalization, anti-miscegenation laws, and so on. Second, the social construction of race involves an introjections or appropriation of particular racial categorizations on the par of individuals.

> For instance, because slave trade broke up families and ethnic groups, slaves forged new kinship systems, customs, and forms of religion and expression in order to maintain their lives, health, and dignity. These new forms and systems served to draw them together as a group, as individuals similar to one another and different from White America. (Warnke 2005, 95)

Warnke clarifies that race is socially constructed through the categorization of racial groups and a wielding of power and control.

The concept of race as socially constructed is important to my study because it illuminates the meanings assigned to students of color in White-dominated college classrooms. White professors may try to openly address issues of race, and White students may try to function under the premise of colorblindness. Nonetheless, the racial significance of students of color is defined through a social hierarchy that imposes culturally invented ideas about race onto students of color. This means that racist beliefs about students of color are still at play. For historically White institutions such as the University of Utah, the classroom is still perceived as the exclusive domain of White students with students of color treated as though they were encroaching on this entitlement (Turner 1994).

Even well intended views can be damaging as is demonstrated when the students in my study were positioned in the role of cultural expert. Professors and students may have a sincere desire to simply learn about another culture from one who they assume has had first-hand experience. They may even consider themselves as honoring a student's cultural difference by asking them to speak as the representative of their race. However, their requests and demands often place students in the position of teaching their classmates about race that is politically controversial and emotionally charged subject matter. In this position, students of

color are valued to the extent to which they can provide White professors and White students with the educational experience they seek. In predominantly White universities and classrooms, White professors and White students are empowered both socially and institutionally to play out their desire to learn racial knowledge and to make demands that students of color give it to them (Jones 1999). This is a form of racial hostility because students of color are treated as instruments to facilitate White students' education and awareness of the world. Ironically, students of color are deterred and otherwise prohibited from using their racial knowledge towards their own educational ends, whether or not they choose to disclose racial information to their classmates and professors.

Furthermore, the roles that students of color are pressured into often stand in for White professors' and White students' lack of knowledge about, limited interaction with, and refusal to engage students of color about their ideas about self and society. I make the case in this study that these instances form a recurring pattern that is tantamount to a curriculum by which students of color *learn the rules of racial subjugation through experiencing racial subjugation*. Students in my study had different ways of engaging this curriculum. Through talking with them about their experiences, I surmised that there were different degrees to which they were able to gain some leverage over it to treat it as a standpoint view and use it as a site of knowledge-production. In later chapters, I will discuss my findings in regard to the varying degrees of leverage; the strategies students used to gain leverage; and the lessons they learned about self, society and academia in the process.

Another important theoretical consideration that comes from understanding race as a social construction is that members of subjugated groups, despite being oppressed on multiple levels, also have social agency. Paul Willis states, "social agents are not passive bearers of ideology, but active appropriators" (Willis 1977, 23). In other words, people who are subjugated, in their efforts to protect themselves against oppressive forces, become active in the process of changing the social outcomes and meanings of racism. This oppositional engagement is often referred to as contestation and resistance, or "individualized expressions of nonconformity, creativity or just acting out" (Apple 1995, 37). Agency has also been defined in the context of collective social actions as "struggles and antagonisms that are ideologically organized around racial solidarity and linked to categories of social identity, especially racial/ethnic identities" (Miron and Lauria 1998, 190).

In my study, I found that students of color exercised agency when they worked alone in the classroom and at other times collaborated to support one another. Their collaborations included enrolling and attending classes with one another and sharing a conceptual language for understanding their experiences in ways that warded off the internalization of racial inferiority. They recognized but did not accept or assimilate to the racial categories imposed on them by White students and White professors. Instead they sought to devise strategies that would help them navigate out from under racial projections and towards self-defined standpoints (Collins 1991). They accomplished this by actively pursuing and producing oppositional knowledge both on their own individually and collectively in dyads and larger cohorts.

Subjugation and Resistance

The students of color in my study claimed their status as members of marginalized groups both in society and in White-dominated classrooms. By doing so, they used the margins as a vantage point for understanding the ideological and practical mechanics of racial subjugation. Thus, they were able to hone a lens of critique that demystified and debunked the epistemic authority of White mainstream culture and assert the legitimacy of the insights that came from their lived experience. In this way, racial subjugation was transformed by students of color into "a site of resistance" (hooks 1990b, 41).

Racial subjugation is a terrible force that plagues men, women and children on a global level by creating "any unjust situation where, systematically and over a long period of time, one group denies another group access to the resources of society" (Collins 2000, 6). People who are subjugated have different ways of coping with the generalized and particular oppressive conditions that manifest in their lives. As discussed earlier, some people of color strive to become White-identified in an attempt to access the same privileges as White and to evade the violent realities of racism. Other people of color idealize their racial ethnic heritage as a way of decentering Whiteness and declaring their culture as superior to all others; such is the case with Afrocentrism and its celebration of Black culture (Asante 1998). Although Black feminist thought was constructed through an analysis of the lives of Black women across lines of race, class, gender and historical eras, as a framework it establishes important principles for understanding the relationship between subjugation and resistance for many oppressed people.

Black feminist thought approaches subjugation not only as a social condition but also as an epistemological standpoint. Racial subjugation describes the social and material forms of oppression that Black women face on a daily basis. It also points to an epistemic position from which Black women have witnessed the operation of White mainstream society from behind its veneer of racial superiority. Therefore to talk about 'claiming' a subjugated standpoint is not to suggest that Black women should acquiesce to inequality. On the contrary, it is a reference to a phenomenon by which some Black women have recognized that they are victims of racial subjugation, and even as they struggle to ward off the material constraints of oppression, have opened their awareness to the knowledge available to them from this social precipice. bell hooks speaks to the difference between acquiescing to racial subjugation and claiming it as an epistemic standpoint:

> These statements identify marginality as much more than a site of deprivation; in fact I was saying just the opposite, that it is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance. It was this marginality that I was naming as a central location for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse…that space of refusal, where one can say no to the colonizer, no to the downpressor, is located in the margins. (hooks 1990a, 149-150)

In hooks' view, marginality should not be defined by what it lacks that the mainstream possesses. If so, the margins would be a place from which to flee -- a place without value. Hooks reconstitutes the value of the margins by demonstrating how its inhabitants embody a wealth of knowledge – knowledge that is self-reflexive and marked by social critique – that helps them navigate mainstream society and protect their communities against dehumanization. From the Black feminist perspective, epistemology is a place of struggle where the stakes are high. For Black women and other oppressed groups who do not always have control over the material

conditions of living, their consciousness is one place over which they can have dominion. Therefore, knowledge and consciousness are sites of subjugation, struggle and potentially, sites of resistance.

I remember when I was a little girl, my grandpa would say to me, "Get your education, Deanna. They [White people] cannot take that away from you." There were layers of meaning encoded in grandpa's shibboleth. One was that White people could not control knowledge and consciousness in the same way they could control property, jobs or even death. Grandpa shared this wisdom with all of his granddaughters to make certain that we understood the perils of White mainstream society for members of oppressed groups. At the same time, his message instructed us in a strategy of resistance – that we should gain control over our minds.

hooks made reference to a conversation she had with her mother just before leaving for college. In this case, her mother's words were geared towards counseling her daughter on how to protect her consciousness as she immersed herself into studies at a predominantly White university. hooks writes:

> Once mama said to me as I was about to go again to the predominantly White university, "You can take what the White people have to offer, but you do not have to love them." Now understanding her cultural codes, I know that she was not saying to me not to love people of other races. She was speaking about the reality of colonization and the reality of what it means to be taught in the culture of domination by those who dominate. She was insisting on my power to be able to separate useful knowledge that I might get from the dominating group from participation in ways of knowing that would lead to estrangement, alienation, and worse –assimilation and co-optation. She was saying that it is not necessary to give yourself over to them to learn…She was reminding me of the necessity of opposition and simultaneously encouraging me not to lose that radical perspective shaped and formed by marginality. (hooks 1990a, 150)

hooks' mother cautioned her daughter against allowing her consciousness to be molded by "those who dominate." The strategy of resistance advocated here is to hold onto the insights of marginality that reveal the dialectical relationship between mainstream society's beliefs, practices and policies and the depressed conditions of oppressed groups. By debunking mainstream society's explicit and implicit claims of racial superiority, members of marginalized groups gain leverage over internalizing racial inferiority or abandoning the radical perspective of marginality in order to participate in a culture of White supremacy.The Black feminist perspective of subjugation and resistance speaks most aptly to the way in which the students in my study have navigated racially hostile classrooms. They experience racial subjugation in White-dominated classrooms by being continually pressured into playing racialized roles that dehumanize them as members of racial ethnic minority groups and as students. What distinguishes my research participants from other students of color is that they have claimed the knowledge available to them from the margins. They have opened their awareness to understanding how race works dialectically between dominant and marginalized groups, and actively use that standpoint knowledge to develop a critical consciousness about race, self, society, academia, and education. Using this standpoint, they have developed strategies that protect them from internalizing racial inferiority and from accepting White racial superiority without question. These strategies assist them in navigating the racialized social and academic tensions in classrooms, and in carving out "a radical creative space that affirms and sustains [their] subjectivity"(hooks 1990a, 153).

Education and Empowerment

From a Black feminist perspective, education and empowerment are inalienable. Because a person's consciousness is a domain where oppression can be warded off, individuals are urged to take the acquisition of knowledge very seriously. Special diligence is paid to where the knowledge is coming from, what uses it will be put to, and the impact it may have on the knowledge holder and whoever else is affected by its application. Recall back to the remarks made by bell hooks' mother, urging her daughter to separate out the knowledge that would 'colonize her mind' from the knowledge that would assist her in navigating the barriers of dominant society. From a Black feminist perspective, education is political, and can lead to subjugation or empowerment. In fact, 'schooling' is often equated with subjugation, while 'education' is discussed as the acquisition of both knowledge and wisdom through a process that does not necessarily take place in an academic setting.

It is often taken for granted that schooling is beneficial for all students. One of the intended goals of public schooling is to provide education for everyone regardless of race, gender, or class, to prepare individuals for democratic citizenship, and offer them an equal opportunity for socioeconomic mobility. The desegregation of schools heralded an era in which racial separatism was declared unconstitutional. Racially integrated schools were institutionalized to offer all students the same academic resources and professional opportunities. In some cities, White communities were so opposed to admitting Blacks into schools that the National Guard had to be called in to ensure that the mandate was carried out. While a court

order could force a school to open its doors to African American children, transforming the racist norms that informed teachers' attitudes and school culture to this day remains a dream deferred. Furthermore, school curricula, both at the K-12 and college level, continue to be founded upon the scholarship of White male academics. Thus, schooling for members of subjugated groups has often been accompanied by the transmission of White-centered cultural values at the expense of their own. At best, school is considered a place to learn important information that will be used to gain academic and professional credentials. Yet there is the constant danger of becoming indoctrinated in dominant group beliefs that are founded upon the inferiority of oppressed groups. To take in dominant group knowledge without question is tantamount to participating in one's own dehumanization by internalizing racial inferiority. Carter G. Woodson stated more explicitly in *The Mis-Education of the Negro;*

> The so-called modern education, with all its defects, however, does others so much more good than it does the Negro, because it has been worked out in conformity to the needs of those who have enslaved and oppressed weaker peoples. For example, the philosophy and ethics resulting from our educational system have justified slavery, peonage, segregation, and lynching. The oppressor has the right to exploit, to handicap, and to kill the oppressed. Negroes daily educated in the tenets of such a religion of the strong have accepted the status of the weak as divinely ordained. (Woodson 1972, xxxii)

Woodson issues a serious warning to African Americans about formal schooling by pointing to the ways that mainstream knowledge is imbued with the same ideologies that have justified various forms of violence against Blacks. Woodson's angst in regard to formal schooling is that Blacks who go through it unquestioningly will internalize, embrace, and perpetuate the mechanisms of racial inferiority and racial

oppression. To protect against this peril, Mwalimu Shujaa encourages African Americans to make a clear distinction between education and schooling. Shujaa writes:

> My view is that schooling is a process intended to *perpetuate* and maintain the society's existing power relations and the institutional structures that support those arrangements…Education, in contrast to schooling, is the process of transmitting from one generation to the next knowledge of the values, aesthetics, spiritual beliefs, and all things that give a particular cultural orientation its uniqueness. Every cultural group must provide for this transmission process or it will cease to exist. (Shujaa 1993, 330-331)

Shujaa goes on to discuss how independent schools oriented to African American culture can provide Black students with essential academic knowledge and Black cultural knowledge they need to build their self-esteem in a White supremacist society. Black feminists also draw upon this important distinction between formal schooling and education but rather than endorsing Afrocentric schools, they recognize that a racially-uplifting education can be learned in spaces outside of any formal institution or academic curriculum. They point out that Black women have responded to oppression and exclusion by "teaching critical consciousness in domestic space" (hooks 1990b, 47).

For example, bell hooks posits the "homeplace" as a site of resistance from the oppression that Black people face in their daily interactions with White mainstream society (hooks 1990b). Hooks uses the situation of Black women domestic workers, her own mother being one of them, to illustrate her point. Black women would have to leave their own families, often located on the outskirts of town, and travel to the neighborhoods and homes of wealthy White families. There they did the work of cooking, cleaning and tending to White children. These women

would have to travel back home at the end of long day with very little time and energy to give to their own children. Nonetheless, some women found ways to reserve a bit of time, energy, and affection for their own children. For example, Frederick Douglass wrote about his mother who was a slave who worked as a field hand. Forced to work away from home and labor in the fields from sun up to sundown, Douglass' mother would walk twelve miles at night to see her son. She would tuck him in bed, lay with him until he fell asleep, but by the time Douglass woke up in the morning she would have already returned to the fields. Although Douglass says that he felt affection towards his mother much like he had towards a stranger, hooks theorizes the importance of those rare and few night visits. hooks explains that Douglass' mother returned home to be with her son and by showing him love and tenderness contributed to his developing sense of being human in a society that was set up to debase him. Thus, hooks theorizes the herculean efforts of Black women to reserve some amount of time, energy and nurturance towards their families and communities as an act of resistance that provided Black people with a sense of themselves as valuable human beings. These relationships and interactions often took place in homes in which Black women played a central role within the family. hooks posits that the 'homeplace' is a site of resistance:

> Black women resisted by making homes where all Black people could strive to be subjects, not object, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside public world. This task of making a homeplace was not simply a matter of Black women providing service; it was about the construction of a safe place where Black people could affirm one another and by doing so heal many wounds inflicted by racist domination. (hooks 1990b, 42)

Located on the social and geographic margins, homeplaces were considered safe because they were not under surveillance by White people. Additionally, they were safe because Black women made them free from oppressive racial beliefs and structures in order to cultivate home into a place where men, women and children could all be free to define themselves.

Homeplaces and other safe spaces are crucial because they offer members of subjugated groups a place to develop a critical consciousness. This is central to Black women cultivating a definition of self that is self-defined and not imposed on them from White mainstream society. A critical consciousness is developed by Black women who have access to a safe space that helps them see and experience their "dignity, integrity of being" (hooks 1990b, 41). Thus, Black women gain an alternative and affirmative view of self that they can weigh against the negative and controlling images of Black womanhood portrayed in the mainstream media. By constant comparison of the negative stereotypes projected onto them by White dominant society against the knowledge of self they cultivate in safe spaces that uncover their humanity, Black women begin to build an epistemological ground in which questioning dominant society becomes a matter of survival and resistance. At the same time they become free to problematize dominant ideologies, this dialectical process contributes to Black women's sense of themselves as legitimate knowledge holders/producers and intellectuals. Armed with a critical consciousness and a self-defined standpoint, Black women become active agents for personal empowerment and in leading social change movements.

The powerful connection between education, critical consciousness and empowerment is also important for understanding what students of color in my study learned in racially hostile college classrooms. They developed strategies of resistance that enabled them to transform experiences of being racially subjugated in the college classroom into a critical consciousness. When I asked students of color in my study if they had ever felt empowered in classrooms at the University of Utah, many of them indicated that they did not feel empowered. Instead, they posited alternative definitions of empowerment. Their definitions were often historically contextualized and offered a critique of both White mainstream society and racial politics at the University of Utah. Interestingly, their critique of the notion of empowerment demonstrated that they had acquired an education that gave them the analytical tools to redefine empowerment on their own terms. From a Black feminist framework, the students in my study had in fact achieved a degree of personal empowerment and had done so by resisting indoctrination in White dominant values through the Eurocentric curriculum, White norms of classroom behavior and internalized racial inferiority. They claimed standpoint knowledge themselves by using their everyday experiences of racial subjugation and researching antiracist texts outside of the mainstream curriculum to form self-defined standpoints about self, society, academia, and racism.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This dissertation takes a qualitative approach towards research design and methods. In an effort to understand how students of color were thinking about the racial dynamics they experienced in college classrooms, I chose to collect data primarily through formal interviews that employed both structured and unstructured questions. I also spent nearly two years developing a rapport with students by attending various student group meetings, talking with them informally, and otherwise spending time with them on campus. During that time I engaged in participant observation, took field notes, and collected archival data. However, since my study does not seek to document classroom interactions, but rather takes into serious consideration how students of color conceptualize their experiences in classrooms, I did not spend time observing classrooms. Up to this point, the voices of students of color have been absent from or marginalized within conceptualizations of antiracist education. My goal in providing a detailed description *from the perspective of students of color* about their experiences is to bring their voices into conversations with scholars about how to build an antiracist pedagogy into college classrooms.

Background of Researcher and Research Topic

This qualitative study was formed out of my own experiences as a student of color in predominantly White classrooms. Like many American children, school was a place where much of my time away from home was spent. As a youngster, I always noticed the way situations unfolded in classrooms, around me, between students and that all powerful entity, the teacher. Being a light-skinned Black, middle class student positioned me uncomfortably and sometimes dangerously against Black students from poorer predominantly Black neighborhoods and the White kids from wealthy neighborhoods. I felt alienated from both groups. My primary defense mechanism against slipping into conflict with either of them was to observe everyone cautiously.

In eighth grade, I learned my first lessons regarding the role of racism, classism and educational equity. I was mistakenly tracked into a Foods and a Social Science class for students labeled as behavior problems and academically at-risk. In these classes, I was no longer the token Black student. We were all youth of color, most from working class backgrounds. The curriculum in these classes was seriously watered down. My parents caught the mistake and restored me back to college preparatory classes. The contrast between curricula, teacher engagement, and student demographics was disturbing. I remained attuned to educational inequities throughout all my years of schooling.

When I entered graduate school at the University of Utah, my tendency towards observing educational processes in classrooms continued. Just as in my years in K-12 and undergraduate studies, the classrooms were predominantly White. Although rather than being juxtaposed between White students and a critical mass of Black students, I tended to be the only one or one of few Blacks (or students of color) in my classes. This often made me the representative of my race simply because there was no one else to defer to who had lived experience of race-related issues.

One of the most significant differences in graduate school was that my classes were in a department of education that proclaimed a social justice orientation to research and teaching. This often translated to an expectation that although taught in a predominantly White institution, the classes would challenge and disrupt Eurocentric curriculum and pedagogy. In many aspects, the courses in my graduate program accomplished this goal. As a student, I was prepared to hold a double consciousness about the Eurocentrism that continues to define academia. The department also provided me with tools to carve out my own radical spaces of intellectual inquiry. However, what I learned in classrooms was not always a result of the intended curriculum.

My experiences in these classrooms led me to my current research topic. I noticed that when professors engaged antiracist pedagogy in predominantly White classrooms, the interactions and discussions between White students, students of color and the instructor were often charged with strong emotions and conflict. The impact of these classroom experiences combined with readings in the area of critical

pedagogy, feminist pedagogy, and Whiteness theory were disturbing to me, other students of color, and I am sure White students were unnerved as well. As a way of coping, I placed myself in the dual role of participant and observer. Initially, I spent hours nearly every day debriefing with my classmates of color about the hostile and sometimes painful cross-racial experiences we were having in our classes. These long conversations with peers were a cathartic opportunity to address what we were experiencing, our individual and collective interpretations, strategies for negotiating the tensions, and ultimately, how we were effected academically. Many of us agreed that our efforts to discuss course material in class were stymied by White students' desires to have students of color disclose our stories of oppression and struggle; give them permission to use theories of color and to use people of color as their research subjects; tolerate their defensiveness when talking about race; be silent and invisible as they discovered racism and their racial identity for the first time; and by the end of the semester, redeem and baptize them as good antiracist Whites.

Negotiating Entry

In 2005, I embarked on a pilot study to pursue my interest in students of color, antiracist education and conflict studies. I decided to volunteer for a campus-based student organization called the Diversity Board. This organization was a branch of the student government. The director of the board is appointed by the student body president. Then the director of the Diversity Board selects three individuals to serve as associate directors. Outside of that the Diversity Board is comprised of student volunteers, and anyone can volunteer regardless of their racial

ethnic background. I was drawn to the Diversity Board because the director at the time had a strong mission to facilitate social justice and diversity education both within the organization and for the campus at large. My research project was aimed at examining the internal dynamics of dialogue and race within the Diversity Board as a cross-racial group.

I had no problems gaining entry into the Diversity Board as a research site. First, the open membership policy meant that I was free to attend all meetings and events as a university student. Secondly, the mission of the Diversity Board to promote social justice and diversity education was aligned with my goals as an academic and an educator. I had met the director of the Diversity Board on previous occasions. His name was Arturo. Arturo was a sophomore when we first met and self-identified as Navajo and Mexican American. He and I had frequent and spontaneous candid conversations about racial identity and racism. I recall in 2004 we walked together across the campus quad. It was the last week of school before the summer. Arturo shared with me his hurt and exasperation towards racist encounters with White students, professors, staff and administrators. He also expressed anger towards the history of colonization and its impact on American Indian and Mexican American people. He was on his way to the library to return books he had checked about Mexican American history and politics. Arturo expressed his determination to learn as much as he could about his racial ethnic heritage. I shared with Arturo my own journey to build knowledge and pride in my racial ethnic heritage as a light skinned African American woman. I also shared with him how my resentment towards racist encounters with Whites and the history of

colonization had impacted me in ways that were potentially self-destructive. We parted ways with a hug and an acknowledgement that we both were on a powerful, transformative journey through racial terrain.

The other important connection between Arturo and me was that we both had attended workshops with Lee Mun Wah, a well known and respected facilitator of dialogues about racism. Arturo and I attended one of Mun Wah's most popular workshops entitled Unlearning Racism. In this workshop Mun Wah assists attendees of diverse racial ethnic backgrounds to have honest conversations about our experiences with racism. These dialogues often lead participants into deep and painful terrain of unresolved trauma related to racist encounters and discrimination. Although Mun Wah's methods have been contested in some circles, many have had cathartic and empowering experiences under his facilitation. Arturo and I attended workshops at different times but we often talked about what we learned about ourselves and racism from the Unlearning Racism training. We both had taken a course with Mun Wah on how to facilitate conversations about racism. These experiences created a bond between Arturo and me. At times he would debrief with me about the dynamics of the Diversity Board after the meetings had ended and all the attendees were gone. In turn, I shared with him my perspectives on group dynamics. When I decided to do a pilot study with the Diversity Board as my research site, I had no reservations talking to Arturo about it. He put me on the agenda for the Diversity Board meeting and supported me in talking to the students in attendance about the purpose of my research project. Students were receptive to my project. The major change in my participation was that I began to take notes

during meetings. Otherwise, I continued participating in planning and coordinating events with students.

After conducting a pilot study for five months, I determined that studying the dynamics of interaction and dialogue within the multiracial group was not a viable project. I observed that "the group" was incredibly fluid, and morphed at a rate so rapid that examining their communication practices during regular meetings was unmanageable. Every meeting a different group of students attended. The director and the associate directors remained constant but there was no way to predict who else would show up on any given weekly meeting. One week five students showed up and the next week there were fifteen students. One constant factor was that students in attendance were from diverse racial ethnic backgrounds including African American, Asian American, Latina/o, and Pacific Islander. I noticed two White students, a male and a female, who attended the Diversity Board meetings on occasion. As a researcher this made it difficult for me to refer to and make observations about the group and their interactions with one another. When it came time to establish a time for the next week's meeting I discovered that the students who attended Diversity Board meetings were actively involved in multiple university and campus based organizations. This made it difficult for them to attend Diversity Board meetings regularly although their sporadic attendance was a sign of their ongoing support.

Once I decided to abandon my initial research topic, I focused on my role as a volunteer within the Diversity Board. While carrying out mundane tasks for events, my current research topic began to take shape. It seemed that my informal

experience as a participant observer led me to see that the seeds of my study could be planted in unplanned places. For example, the students and I would be setting up a room for a movie night. As we arranged chairs, students debriefed with one another about their everyday struggles in class. We would be stuffing folders with conference programs and the conversation would again lead to their trouble with White classmates and professors in class that day. Students used these moments to testify and be witnessed back to by their peers who could relate to their experiences. They used those moments to figure out who needed a hug, a phone call of concern or an ally to sit with them in class. Notably, these students were often academic high-achievers, involved in campus life, dutiful to their family obligations, reliable employees, and caring friends. Disturbed by the numerous and blatantly racist experiences they were sharing about class and in humble admiration of their strategies for survival and success, I decided to study their negotiation of the racial dynamics they experienced in predominantly White classrooms.

Recruiting Research Participants

My participation in the Diversity Board became the site in which I built a rapport with several undergraduate students of color. Through casual conversations they talked to me about their struggles with White students and White professors regarding race-related issues. These conversations signaled to me potential research participants. After our conversation I would explain my study to the student and asked if they would be willing to be interviewed by me about their racialized experiences in the classroom.

During the process of recruiting and interviewing students, I began to recognize the importance of clearly defining the criteria for choosing certain students over others. Recruiting students for this study reminded me that 'students of color' are not a homogenous group. Some students may phenotypically appear to be members of a racial ethnic minority group, but choose to "pass as White". I began to realize that I had been using the term students of color without interrogating it. Underlying it were assumptions that students identified as a member of one or more racial ethnic minority groups. This distinction became a crucial point to consider in my efforts to recruit students to this study. Identifying oneself as a racial ethnic minority in a predominantly White environment in which members of White mainstream society hold power and authority (i.e., University of Utah campus, the U.S.) is not only a cultural descriptor, but also a defiant political stance. I negotiated this issue and refined my criteria for research participants during the earlier stages of recruitment and student interviews.

As stated earlier, I began to formally conduct this research process after having identified several potential participants through a pilot study. While I already had five students confirm their participation, I knew that I would have to recruit more students in order to thoroughly explore the topic. In the end, all of the students I interviewed had a connection either to me or with other students who volunteered to be interviewed. They also held affiliations with the Center for Ethnic Student Affairs or the Diversity Board, and some were actively involved with both organizations. However, there was one student who was outside of that social network. I met him at a lecture on campus and we had continued albeit brief contact

with one another on campus. Keith identified as Chinese-American. He held no affiliations to campus groups and organizations that served students of color. Keith described himself as a loner. I was surprised and excited that Keith agreed to let me interview him about the racial dynamics that students of color experienced in the classroom. We scheduled a one-hour session and proceeded with the interview.

In the first two questions, Keith responded very differently than the students of color I had talked to previously. He identified his racial ethnic identity but downplayed the importance of it. At that moment, I began to modify my approach to the interview. I asked Keith the same questions as other students, but I felt as though I had to pretend to be neutral about the topic. In other words, I worked very hard to listen to Keith's responses nonjudgmentally. Keith described an incident in his Sociology classes where the teacher called on him to speak as the representative of all people of color, in this case, for African American survivors of Hurricane Katrina. Keith told me that he felt it was his responsibility to teach White students and White professors about non-White cultures. He went on to say that he was not always comfortable doing so, but that he thought he had an obligation to serve as a cultural ambassador. I struggled internally with Keith's stance. Hearing about the classroom incidents triggered my own resentment at having been placed in the same situation time and again. Nonetheless, I bracketed my emotions and halted all of the judgment that was poised and ready to be directed towards Keith. I reminded myself that Keith was graciously and candidly sharing his experiences with me, a perfect stranger – or rather an imperfect stranger. I carried on the interview in a spirit of

gratitude, thanked Keith profusely when we had finished, and wondered what I was going to do with his interview.

I decided to use my interview with Keith as a critical learning moment within my research training. Personally and professionally, talking with Keith tested my ability to listen to testimonies that I may not be able to relate to or with which I do not want to identify. In a way, Keith reminded me that the purpose of interviewing students is not for my own cathartic release. At the same time, I have to admit that I did experience a mixture of painful emotions, catharsis and even liberation every time I interviewed students. Handling these feelings is seldom an aspect of training new researchers (Spradley 1980; Rager 2005), although I am grateful that it was an open topic with my faculty advisors. I was humbled when students found their interview session with me to be therapeutic. Yet, even though there were many personal and emotional dynamics during our sessions, my researcher identity journeyed alongside of me and us in order to catalog what all of these experiences meant for the research topic. In a pragmatic sense, talking with Keith pressed me to critically and explicitly define who I was referring to when using the term 'students of color.' I developed a definition that I could easily operationalize, and sought students who identified with two or more of the following criteria:

a) Raised, socialized in or otherwise claimed membership in one or more racial ethnic minority groups (e.g., African American, Asian American, Chicana/o, Latina/o, Native American)

b) Possessed a repertoire of experiences related to their identity as a racial ethnic minority student

c) In the process of studying the cultural and political history of racial ethnic minority groups

d) Affiliated with campus organizations that serve racial ethnic minority students

Throughout this study, I have continued to use the terms 'students of color' and 'racial ethnic minority students' interchangeably. However, I will make a distinction in terms when discussing the racial dynamics that students of color experience amongst one another. It is also important to note, these students were very invested in their academic goals. Although they faced many struggles to gain access to higher education and to reach their desired level of academic performance once enrolled at the University of Utah, these students persevered. They utilized university-based resources, relied on their friends and family for support, and often soldiered on through their challenges alone. Many of these students wanted to focus on diversity-related issues in their academic studies. They found that in raising questions related to race, and by their mere presence as a student of color, White classmates and professors were often resistant, hostile or dismissive of them. They were all in the process of learning how to navigate their way through the racial politics of being a student of color on campus. They proved to be excellent sources of information, and advanced me towards my analytical goal (Sandelowski 1995), by providing me with detailed descriptions of their experiences in classrooms from the perspective of racial ethnic minority students.

I guided the recruitment of participants to this study through the principles of *purposeful sampling* (Sandelowski 1995) and *snowball technique* (Marshall and Rossman 2006). The first set of students interviewed, I had met during the pilot study. We were already engaged in discussions about their racial experiences in classrooms. Jarihd, Oscar, Makini, Zion, and Angela not only agreed to be

interviewed by me about the racial dynamics they experienced in their classrooms, they pressed me to quickly complete the necessary academic procedures (i.e., IRB, write and defend my research proposal, etc.) so that we could proceed to the interview phase. I interpreted this as the students' eagerness to be heard and acknowledged about the racial hostilities they had faced in classrooms in a way that validated their ideas and experiences.

I was introduced to the second set of research participants through my time spent at the Center for Ethnic Student Affairs (CESA) and through Jarihd's help. This led to the strategy referred to as *snowballing* in which potential research participants are located through current research participants (Marshall and Rossman 2006). CESA is an all-purpose site for students of color. In a large room with a ten station computer lab and well-worn couches, students of color find respite from negotiating the politics of a predominantly White campus. CESA provides them with academic advising, multi-subject tutoring, and financial aid information. CESA is also the place where students of color ate lunch as a group, plan events both on and off campus, work in study groups, and hold meetings for the various groups housed within it such as Black Student Union and the Pacific Islander Student Association. Students who spend time in CESA tend to be already thinking about their identity as racial ethnic minority students. I met Arianna, Gaelle, and Catalina at CESA. Additionally, Jarihd took time to help me create a flyer inviting students to participate in my study. Together we posted these flyers around the student union and various academic departments. I did not recruit students who had heard about my study through the poster. However, Jarihd walked with me around the union and

introduced me to every student of color he knew which was a lot. With his personal introduction of me and explanation of my study, several students expressed their willingness and interest in being interviewed by me. They also began to list off students who they knew were experiencing race-related difficulties in their classes. I thank Jarihd for his assertive and integral role in helping me establish credibility as a researcher with undergraduate students of color. All students were undergraduates at a four-year state university. The following descriptions of students are based on the information they gave me at the time this study was conducted.

Student Portraits

Catalina is nineteen years old and self-identifies as Latina from Peru. She also self-identifies as Mormon. She is a sophomore majoring in History and Education. Catalina aspires to teach history and social justice. She is a member of the *Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan* (MEChA) and participates in the Honors Program for academically high-achieving students. Catalina also became an associate director of the Diversity Board.

Angela is a junior and self-identifies as Black. Her mother is White and German descent. Her father is African American. Angela holds dual citizenship for both the United States and Germany. She explained that she deliberately did not mention her gender or sexual orientation because she felt that neither affected her as much as her racial identity. Angela was majoring in History with a minor in African American History.

Midwin is eighteen years old and self-identifies as African American. Both her mother and father are Haitian. She refers to herself as African American, in part

to avoid providing people with more detailed information about her Haitian background. She thinks that people will not be sincerely interested. Midwin wants to go into the field of medicine and is also considering earning a doctorate degree and becoming a professor.

Jarihd is twenty years old and self-identifies as South Asian Indian. He explained that his family is originally from India. His great grandparents lived in the Fiji Islands as indentured servants. His family went from the Fiji Islands to India and then moved to the United States in the late 1960s. Jarihd grew up in California until he was eight years old and then moved with his family to Salt Lake City. Jarihd also self-identifies as gay, male and working class. He acknowledges the social privileges he receives simply by being a male. At the same time, he describes himself as a Nancy Boy. This term refers to a gay male who does not fit traditional masculine roles, and instead enjoys hobbies associated with women such as reading tabloids, attending Broadway musicals.

John self-identifies as mixed race. He often explains to people that he is third generation Korean American (Mother) and seventh generation Austrian American (Father). John's mother sent him and his sister to Korean school where they would attend every day after public school to learn Korean language and culture. John noted that upon seeing him, people recognize that he is not White, but they cannot identify his ethnicity. He has been interrogated by both White people and people of color trying to categorize his identity. John is a double major in Political Science and Sociology. He is also considering completing the requirements for a major in Gender Studies. John also explained that he thinks a lot about sexual orientation and

gender identity. He also self-identifies as a boychick. Boychick is a term used to refer to a person who is physiologically a male and who chooses hobbies/interests, uses mannerisms, and styles of dress traditionally associated with females, e.g., wearing high heels, "walking like a girl."

Makini is twenty-three years old and self-identifies as African American. She and Zion are sisters. Makini stated that she never really identified with her father's Nigerian heritage. She is a senior majoring in Health Promotions with a minor in African American Studies. Makini was enrolled in a course on Black Feminism. She explained that it had inspired her to think about her identity and experiences as a Black woman. Makini had begun to see the effects of the intersection of race and gender oppression on her own life.

Arianna is a freshman and self-identifies as Boricua. She also refers to herself as Chicana of Puerto Rican (Mother) and Mexican American (Father) descent. Arianna was known for wearing a bright colored flower in her hair on occasion. This attracted the attention of Pacific Islander students who initially assumed that she was Pacific Islander too. Arianna explained that she felt an affiliation with island people and culture and was embraced by many Pacific Islander students. Otherwise, Arianna was frequently subjected to questions about her racial ethnic identity from White students and students of color. Arianna joined MEChA where she says she notices the different levels of security Chicanos have with their identity and yet she wanted to break barriers by stressing that no matter the level of identity development they were in the same struggle.

Oscar is twenty years old and self-identifies as Chicano and bisexual. He was born in Mexico and moved with his family to Salt Lake City, Utah at the age of eight years old. He lived and attended school on the west side of Salt Lake City known for being the place where many Latino and other racial ethnic minority families reside. Oscar explained that from elementary to high school his classmates were predominantly of Latino and Pacific Islander descent. He described the White-dominated environment of the University of Utah as a cultural shock that required personal and social adjustment. Otherwise he described his upbringing as Mexican Roman Catholic because it included many traditions and rituals specific to Mexican culture. Oscar is a member of MEChA.

Rashid is twenty-four years old. He self-identifies as African American. Rashid was born and raised in Cincinnati, Ohio and moved to Salt Lake City on his own at the age of nineteen years old after he graduated from high school. He earned a degree from the Latter Day Saints Business College in 2003 and enrolled in to the University of Utah in 2004. He was originally accepted in the Dance department but decided instead to pursue a degree in Social Work. Rashid explained that he came out as gay at the age of nineteen and has remained public about his sexual orientation.

Eva is a sophomore and self-identifies as biracial, "I'm half Hispanic and half Black." Her mother is Ecuadorian. Eva explained that while she has the appearance of being African American (milk chocolate brown skin and kinky hair) she was in fact raised culturally to be Hispanic. This included learning Spanish as a child. Eva was one of the only students to talk about class issues and how she often felt looked

down upon on campus because she was not from a wealthy background. Eva talked about the discrimination she experienced from African Americans who considered her "not Black enough," and conversely from Latinos who were reluctant to embrace her African roots and dwindling ability to speak Spanish.

Zion is a senior and self-identifies as African American. Her father is Nigerian and her mother is from Manhattan, New York. Zion thinks of the African part of her as a blood connection, not a cultural one. At the time of the interview Zion was conducting research on her own into Black Nationalism. She explained that Black Nationalism appealed to her because of the practice of separatism that she hoped would relieve her from interacting with Whites and experiencing more racism. Also she was enrolled in a course on Black Feminism, one of the few classes in which she had an empowering experience.

I want to note that I interviewed a total of sixteen participants, twelve of whom are represented in this dissertation. The other four interview transcripts were omitted due to a few problems in the data collection process. For example, the first interview I conducted with a participant named Arturo was accidentally erased when I tried to transfer the audio recording from my I-Pod to a computer file. Then I conducted an interview session with two students at once. I wanted to find out if students felt more comfortable talking about their experiences with racism in the classroom with one of their peers present. I thought participants would be able to talk in more depth about the subject by building off of each other's remarks. Conversely, I found it difficult to go beyond a superficial discussion about the topic and so I ended the interview early. The transcript of my interview with Reginald and

Joseph is not included in the findings I present in this dissertation. Lastly, I have not included the interview with Keith for reasons I have explained in the section on *Recruiting Research Participants*.

Data Collection

The primary source of data was collected through individual interviews with research participants and field notes. This method was geared towards highlighting the voices of students of color. I engaged students from the perspective that they had valid and authoritative views on issues related to their racialized experiences in college classrooms.

I used semistructured interviews delivered in a conversational manner. Each interview lasted approximately one to one and one-half hours and was conducted in one session. The questions were developed into an interview protocol. See Figure 5. I posed the same set of questions to each research participant. At the same time, participants' responses varied. I made decisions in the moment as to whether or not I would reframe a question, repeat it or come to it from a different direction. It was important that I was flexible as the interviewer because students' speech patterns and styles varied.

The interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed. I took brief written notes (i.e., jot notes) to keep track of important points I wanted to ask the participant during the session. However, I relied entirely on the digital recorder to tape the conversation so that I would not have to be preoccupied with taking copious notes.

Interview Protocol

This is a sampling of the questions I would like to ask you. Often during interviews, our dialogue will take its own direction, and that's fine. You should feel free to abstain from answering any of these questions. My aim is to talk for 60-minutes, if your schedule permits.

1. What is your age?
2. What is your family's background (nationality, place of birth)?
3. How do you identify yourself in terms of race and ethnicity?
4. Are there identities outside of race, ethnicity that you claim?
5. Which of these identities do you think has had the biggest impact on your educational experience?
6. Here at this university, have you ever felt as though any of your social identities have come into play in classrooms?
7. Do you ever feel like you are expected to play certain roles in class? Who has expectations of you and what roles are you asked to play?
8. Describe the strategies you used to address these moments in the classroom?
9. Do these dynamics happen only in classes designed to address race and diversity (Ethnic studies courses, diversity requirement classes) or do you have these experiences in other subjects/departments as well?
10. Is there a cost for you in trying to negotiate these racial dynamics?
11. Can you think of any benefits?
12. Describe the classroom experiences that have made you feel affirmed and/or empowered.
13. During your time on this campus, what have you learned about race and diversity?
14. How have these dynamics shaped what you want for yourself personally, academically and professionally?
15. Do you know other students who have had experiences or concerns similar to yours?

Figure 5. Interview Protocol

This allowed me to stay more personally engaged with the participant and create a friendly, relaxed interview situation. After each interview, I would go to my car and digitally record my thoughts about the interview process, themes that emerged in the dialogue, and my own emotional reaction to the experience. These recorded notes were also transcribed.

Students responded in first person often narrating stories of experiences with fellow classmates and faculty. Occasionally, they would narrate stories about their friends' experiences in classrooms. These third-person accounts were not included in this study. In keeping with Spradley's description of the ethnographic interview as "a series of friendly conversations into which the researcher slowly introduces new elements to assist informants to respond as informants" (Spradley 1979, 58). I encouraged participants to feel free to disclose as little or as much as they were comfortable sharing with me.

Field notes were comprised of *jot notes* written during interviews, *self-reflexive audio-recordings* of my post interview reflections, and *analysis and interpretation notes* (Spradley 1980). During interviews with students my greatest priority was to listen attentively to them when they were talking to me. For several reasons, I treated listening as a "special responsibility" that called for "alertness and a rigorous refusal to take anything for granted" (Zaner 1998, 65). First, I was humbled by students' willingness to share personal stories with me, especially the ones that brought up painful emotions for them. Knowing that I could not fix their situation or erase their hurt, I put into practice my belief that listening to another person could actually be affirming and healing for the speaker. I could not offer

students money, counseling or other practical solutions to the troubles they faced, so instead I experimented with the idea that the opportunity to tell their story in their own words to a compassionate listener might be a cathartic experience for them.

Secondly, I needed to be able to focus on the content of their testimonies and at the same time actively facilitate the interview process. The use of open ended interview questions meant that there was no correct or incorrect answer. Furthermore, the questions I posed often required more explanation than a yes or no response. As the leader of our discussion, I took responsibility for directing the interview towards a place that demonstrated to the student that I had taken their remarks into account. At the same time I was committed to guiding the question posing in accordance with the interview protocol. This meant that sometimes I would ask students the questions in a nonlinear format, but I remained steadfast in asking every research participant the same set of questions. Due to the rigor of engaging both the content and process of interviewing, I chose to rely on the audio-recorder to tape the interview. I used a small notebook and pen to jot single words that would help me recall a topic mentioned by the student that I wanted to take up later, and to keep track of questions that I had thought to ask as they spoke. Before the interview began, I informed students that I would do a minimal amount of writing and the purpose of my note taking.

Immediately following interview sessions, I kept self-reflexive audio-recordings. Most times these recordings were made in my car or in my home office within fifteen to thirty minutes after the interview. In these recordings, I allowed myself the freedom to talk about any and every aspect of the interview. As

Wolfinger stated, recorded notes are where an ethnographer begins the interpretive process by "describing whatever observations struck them as the most noteworthy, the most interesting, or the most telling" (Wolfinger 2002, 89). I reflected on my own state of mind prior to meeting the student for the interview and what I had done to prepare for the session. Frequently, I reflected on the stories that students shared with me and how their stories affected me emotionally and intellectually. These were the kinds of comments that I chose to bracket out of the interview in order to keep the focus of the session on the student and to ensure that the session lasted within the time frame I had promised. Ultimately, these audio-recorded reflections were used to process my own reactions and become aware of how my thoughts aligned with and varied from students' perspectives. Morrow writes about the importance of this self-reflexive strategy to "become aware of my motivations, assumptions, and biases that might affect the research as well as to discharge troubling emotions that emerged as the study progressed" (Morrow, 2006, 156). These reflections were integral in helping me think through my own background and identity as a researcher, scholar and student of color. I had the audio-recordings transcribed and they became part of my fieldnotes.

Finally, I took analysis and interpretation notes in a handwritten format and as electronic entries typed on the computer. The purpose of this type of fieldnote is to "record generalizations, analyses of cultural meanings, interpretations, and insights into the culture studied" (Spradley 1980). I primarily used these notes to record academic issues related to the study. While the audio-recordings were based on my 'gut reactions' to the interview sessions, the written notes contained more

developed ideas about the connections I noted between students' testimonies and the literature. Analysis and interpretation notes keep track of the intersections between the data, relevant scholarship, and my own thought processes, without the pressures of composing formal text. Spradley describes the role of these notes as follows:

> Analysis and interpretation notes often represent a kind of brainstorming. Ideas may come from past reading, from some particular theoretical perspective, from some comment made by an informant, from talking about your project with a friend. It is important to think of this section in your fieldwork notebook as a place to "think on paper"… . (Spradley 1980, 72)

Sometimes, I would pull an idea or concept from these notes and expand upon them in memos. These pieces of writing helped me to think through ideas and decide if the concept was worth developing into a larger segment of my analysis. Keeping fieldnotes and journaling, both in self-reflexive and academic ways, were an integral part of my research and writing process.

Data Analysis

Analyzing the data was one of the most challenging aspects of the research process. It became clear that I needed a strategy for identifying key interview excerpts and for keeping the data organized. The students provided detailed accounts of their experiences, sharing with me numerous incidents. I became completely absorbed in every individual interview I read. In the beginning I held on to the mindset that "everything the students said to me mattered." The analysis phase of this project required me to develop a serious, consistent and logical plan for managing the data. This led to the difficult task of deciding which pieces of data to include or exclude from the final dissertation. However, the ultimate task of

presenting my findings to readers forced me to make informed and definite decisions about how to shape the data towards a clear purpose.

Analyzing the data was an ongoing process that began after the first recorded interview and continued until the final phases of writing the findings. After the first interview, I returned to my office to begin transcribing. As I listened to the recorded interview for the second time, I paid close attention to the remarks the student made that fit with my expectations; the experiences that surprised, shocked or troubled me; and how ideas posited affirmed, disrupted or extended concepts found in the literature. I jotted notes into a journal with the intention of exploring them again through the interview, through the interviews of other students, and in the literature framing my study.

Transcribing the interviews proved to be a time-consuming process. Shortly after I had finished interviews with all of my research participants, I accepted a full-time position as an academic advisor for African American students at the University of Utah. With this new set of responsibilities and time constraints, I opted to hire a professional transcriptionist to assist me in completing the task of transcribing the interviews. As the finished transcriptions were returned to me, I read through each one while simultaneously listening to the recorded interview. This I used as an opportunity to cross-check the transcription with the actual recording and make any necessary corrections. Occasionally, the transcriber would arrive at unfamiliar acronyms or terms used by the students. For example, several interviewees made reference to ‘CESA’ (Center for Ethnic Student Affairs) that the transcriber wrote

out phonetically as SESA. These were the majority of the kinds of corrections I had to make before finally arriving at a completed document of the interview.

Cross-referencing the document with the recording afforded me yet another opportunity to listen for the topics, issues and ideas stated by the students. I began to underline and highlight remarks made by students that answered my questions directly, or that challenged a concept they had heard or I had posited through my question. For example, I asked each student if they had had experiences in their classes that were affirming or empowering. Often, students adopted a definition of these terms that was different than from the meaning I had given it. They would change the question by inserting a term they deemed more accurate and then answer their question. Examining their modifications help me to recognize my own underlying assumptions. In particular, I used the terms 'affirming' and 'empowering' which were informed by the literature I had been reading in the field of critical pedagogy. Students displayed such a significant departure from the scholarly or common sense use of the term that I began to write memos that discussed students' usage as compared to that of scholar-practitioners.

Other times, students spoke to issues that were not a direct response to my question, but by the prompting of their own thought process and storytelling. For example, discussions around 'the classroom as a safe space' were not a part of my interview protocol, yet several students made reference to the topic. Due to the number of students who raised the issue, the length and extent to which they discussed it, and the specific content, I deemed it important to include in the findings of my study. Although I had not anticipated it, students indicated that the classroom

as a safe space was a theme that related directly to the issue of navigating racial politics in classrooms. Therefore, I crafted the threads of students' testimonies into a narrative configuration that linked them all under one overarching theme (Polkinghorne 1995). This "story" used the literature as a reference point, but also offered a clear representation of students' perspectives.

In time, highlighted and underlined text in student interviews was extended into elaborated ideas and thinking on post-it notes stuck to the sides and back-sides of the document. These post-its were then expanded into memos that would eventually become the excerpts used in the final write-up stages. This strategy mirrors the *constant comparative method* (Glaser and Anselm 1967) in which memo writing aids the researcher in " linking analytical interpretation with empirical reality" (Charmaz 2000, 510). In this way, raw data and memos, or in other terms, students' testimonials and my interpretations, were woven together to build conceptual categories and analysis.

After identifying key statements and ideas, and generating memos for every interview, I became overwhelmed with the task of managing and turning a discriminating lens to the data. At this point I sought out assistance from faculty advisors and peer colleagues. On several occasions, I arranged meetings with my faculty advisors to talk about the logistics of organizing and sorting through memos. I met with Dr. Audrey Thompson several times during the summer to talk about my data. In these conversations, Dr. Thompson read chunks of my data and talked with me about how she saw them responding to the literature in either predictable or insightful ways. We also discussed various approaches to grouping the data into

chapters. I also met with a group of peers who are familiar with my topic of study. They allowed me to talk through some of my findings. Their feedback indicated that the editing choices I made had in fact, shaped the data in ways that actually increased the poignancy and clarity of students' testimonies. After these conversations, I was able to take a wider view of the memos in order to categorize them into overarching themes that both maintained the integrity of students' testimonies and spoke in relevant and thoughtful ways to already existing scholarship.

Researcher Position

The concern over "managing subjectivity" has been a foundational concern in social science research by questioning whether or not the researcher can be objective and impartial in the procedures of collecting data. According to Heshusius some researchers "focus on their subjectivity, to worry about it, and turn it into a set of methodological concerns" (Heshusius 1994, 15). Eventually, I came to think about my subjectivity not as something to be bracketed out or otherwise controlled, but as an important asset in both the procedural and relational aspects of research. The view I held about my positionality as a researcher grew to be similar to the stance taken by Susan Kreiger who wrote the following about her own experience of the research and writing process:

> While recognition of the interactional and contextual nature of social research is not new, how we interpret ourselves during this new period of self-examination may, in fact, add something fresh and significant to the development of sophistication in social science. (Kreiger 1985, 309)

As I engaged in the process of data collection I stopped trying to suppress my emotions and pretending as though I had nothing other than a scholarly interest in the

topic at hand. Like Kreiger, I eventually began to value my emotions as a compass guiding me through researcher-subject relationships, and my personal interest as adding to the overall integrity of my project.

The topic under investigation was full of intense emotions for students and me too, because I had also experienced difficult classroom interactions. My emotional read of our discussions helped me to reaffirm my rapport with students and more importantly respond to them sensitively and appropriately in the interview moment. I subscribed also to DeMarrais' (2004) view that careful attention to emotions – our own and others is essential to quality research.

My identity as a light-skinned African American woman, graduate student and researcher was an asset to the process of developing a research relationship with participants. My visible and politicized identity as a woman graduate student of color assisted me in building a strong and productive rapport with students of color who were engaged in everyday struggles with White students and professors, and therefore frequently sought refuge in racially separate spaces.

At the time of the study I was thirty-two years old and self-identified as Black-African American. I adopted the term 'Black' after studying in Harare, Zimbabwe as an undergraduate student. Under the guided studies of Professor Horace Campbell at the Syracuse University, I was immersed in the political history of Southern Africa and the impact of European Colonization. I noticed that traces of African American cultural forms were present within continental African cultural forms such as dance, music, theater, literature. I also recognized there were definite similarities between the economic and political despair of African peoples and

African Americans. I adopted a Pan-African attitude because I felt it important culturally, politically and personally to acknowledge the links between people of African descent all throughout the Diaspora. Thus the term Black is a designation that I am of African descent and strive towards solidarity with people of African descent around the world. I continue to use this lens of analysis in my academic work and political life.

In Zimbabwe, not only did I reach clarity about my racial ethnic identity but I also had a consciousness-raising experience about the politics of skin tone. One afternoon I joined my classmates for lunch in a café. My mind wandered from our conversation and I realized that the other customers dining were White. The men managing the café, dispatching waiters to tables and greeting guests were classified as Coloured. In Zimbabwe 'coloured' mainly referred to people of Portuguese descent. Black Africans were waiting on tables and bussing dishes. In that moment the racial hierarchy was in full effect and transparent. Then I looked at my own skin color and realized that in this racial hierarchy I was not seen as Black, but as Coloured. This was shocking to me because the Portuguese were notorious for being cruel and harsh in the enslavement practices. I returned to the U.S. with a heightened awareness of the politics of skin tone and the significance of my particular shade of light brown skin.

My visible identity as light skinned helped me build a rapport with participants in this study. It clearly demarcated that I was not White European American, at least not fully. This made students more receptive to my presence and participation in the Diversity Board. It made them more interested to meet me and

hear about my research project. Since many students of color had experienced racially hostile encounters with White students, professors and staff on campus they frequently sought out racially separate spaces. In these spaces such as the Diversity Board or the Center for Ethnic Student Affairs, students' encounters with White students would be less likely or in an environment in which people of color were in the majority. My light skin tone identified me as non-White and placed me in a category of people with whom it was less likely that interacting with would yield a defensive racial encounter from which they would need to recuperate.

It was also an advantage that my skin tone was similar to several of the students of color on campus and to several who participated in this study. We had certain experiences in common, especially those instances in which a White person or a person of color asked us to identify our apparently ambiguous racial ethnic identity. Many of us had been faced with the question from strangers asking, "What are you?" Therefore I had insider knowledge when students talked about their experiences of being interrogated to disclose their racial identity, being wrongly identified as a member of particular racial ethnic group, or accused of being not strongly identified enough as a member of their own racial ethnic group. I had faced the same kinds of questioning.

My politicized identity played an important role. As described earlier in this section, I had undergone several charged experiences related to my racial identity. These experiences often revealed the racial hierarchy in the U.S. and abroad and the positioning of Blacks and people of color in the bottom rungs. These became issues that I had to reconcile both personally and socially. One of the ways I integrated

these insights was by recognizing the myriad of knowledge sets available to me from the margins. I began to read the world more critically. I questioned mainstream media sources and looked for sources that delivered more balanced accounts of history and current events. My formal and self-guided studies worked in tandem to build a strong awareness of inequality, privilege, and the politics of experience. Participants on my study were in the midst of a similar process in which they were weighing the mainstream academic curriculum against their everyday experiences of marginalization. While some students internalized racism and a sense of inferiority, others grasped for knowledge about struggles for racial identity and liberation. In this way, my visible identity and my politicized identity provided me with insight into the experiences and observations that students described to me.

Additionally, my own experiences as a woman graduate student of color often mirrored theirs. This provided me with an intuition that guided me in making procedural and relational research decisions. Students were willing to share their traumatic experiences with me, and because some of my own experiences mirrored theirs I was able to empathize with their emotions. This intuition guided me during the interview process on several occasions. When students began to cry in the midst of explaining a racially hostile situation, I was able to form a thoughtful response that cared for them and was able to be integrated into the research process.

For example, Eva, Angela, and Arianna cried as though to release the emotional frustration and pain that had accrued as a result of incidents with classmates and professors. At the time of our interview, many of those incidents had not been resolved. I felt sympathetic towards the students and tried to speak words of

comfort and encouragement to them. In those moments I felt like I had departed from the researcher role in which I had the objective of staying on topic and prioritizing the content of their remarks rather than feeling the emotional charge of the stories they told me.

During my interview with Makini, I noticed my initial hesitancy to "step out of the role of researcher "in order to console her tears. Makini had been talking to me about an incident in which the departmental academic advisor haughtily informed her that she was not "the kind of student the department was looking for," and that all the professors agreed. Makini cried as she recounted this experience. From her estimation this encounter had paralyzed her academically because she had to submit her graduation papers to the same academic advisor. Makini did not want to return to the advisor fearing another traumatic exchange. Witnessing the psychological damage Makini had incurred, I decided to set aside the interview questions, grab some Kleenex for her, and talk her into mustering up some perspective and courage with which to face the situation. This lasted for approximately twenty minutes, until Makini said she still wanted to continue the interview. After the interview I offered to accompany Makini to the advisor's office to submit her graduation papers. As a new researcher, I was nervous about "crossing the line" between researcher and advocate. I sought the advice of Dr. Sue Morrow in helping me configure that line. Dr. Morrow pointed out that as an antiracist feminist researcher crossing the line is aligned with my professional ethics.

Overall, my identity as a racial ethnic minority student at the University of Utah, the rapport I had built with each participant, and my candor and ease with them

assisted me in building a connection with students that was critical to this research project. I have to assume that students did not tell me all the details about everything they experienced by way of racial dynamics in their classrooms. However, several told me that the experiences they were sharing during our interview were ones that could not be expressed in other institutional forums. This indicated to me that they did not view me as a friend or even a peer, but an approachable, safe extension of the university as an institution. Indeed students often gave testimonies to me making sure they did not leave out details that might help them me "make their case." In turn, I freely shared with them my own experiences and strategies in navigating racially hostile classrooms. As stated by Kreiger, "We need to link our statements about those we study with statements about ourselves, for in reality neither stands alone" (1985, 321). My subjectivity, because it was based in part on my racial identity and academic affiliation, worked as a source of connection, guidance, and insight in the research process.

CHAPTER 4

RACIALIZED ROLES AND THE STRUGGLE FOR SELF-DEFINED STANDPOINTS

> When it is a predominantly all White group, it's hard because they've already created their communication structures. Like I'm already the brown person. Like all the roles have been created in the class subconsciously. I'm the brown guy.
>
> --Jarihd

In college classrooms it is taken for granted that there are two main roles to play – the professor and the student, and although it is difficult to determine the perfect conditions for promoting student learning, the compliance of professors and students to their roles signals the setting as an educational one. The professor is the one endowed with institutional power and authority by the university. With this position comes the responsibility to design and instruct courses approved by their respective departments. As the recognized holder of expert knowledge, the professor is also charged with evaluating the degree to which students have mastered the course material. The role of students is to absorb the information imparted by the professor. Their responsibility is to come to class with the proper materials (e.g., textbooks, notebooks, and pens), arrive on time, and follow the guidelines of

classroom participation. However, Jarihd's remarks above suggest that students of color are pressed into playing racialized roles that are preexisting in White-dominated classrooms. Participants in this study indicated that these roles contributed to making classrooms racially hostile.

Classrooms are not immune from the social problems that plague other institutional and social contexts. This adds layers of complexity to the seemingly simple relationship between students and the professor. In predominantly White colleges and universities, racial dynamics aggravate tensions between students of color and White mainstream students and faculty. This is often the case in institutions that compartmentalize 'diversity' as the charge of specific offices (e.g., Center for Multicultural Services), token staff members, and faculty of color with diversity-related interests. Similarly, students of color often become the representatives of diversity and culture in predominantly White classrooms. This can have the negative effect of stigmatizing students of color and pressing them into roles that serve the educational interests of White students and White professors.

Poststructural studies of race and pedagogy have provided valuable insight into the subtle workings of racism in predominantly White college classrooms (Ellsworth 1997; McLeod and Yates 2003; Diangelo 2006). The work of these scholars has raised awareness of how the aims of antiracist educators and the racial demographics of students contribute to volatile classroom interactions (Ellsworth 1989; Walkerdine 1992; Razack 1998; Hunter and Nettles 1999). They offer careful and candid analysis of the failures and successes of their own attempts to build an inclusive classroom that empowers students. These scholar-practitioners tend to

apply their insights towards examining how the politics of identity and difference and the undergirding principles of critical pedagogy disrupt educators' attempts to make good on the promises of empowerment for all students in the classroom (Ellsworth 1989; Gore 1992; Orner 1992; Jones 1999). While their work offers theoretical and practical recommendations for bringing White students past the point of White defensiveness and towards a race consciousness, discussions about the educational interests of students of color are conspicuously absent. For example, scholar Rosa Hernandez Sheets has pointed out the sharp turn towards White students in the field of multicultural education and has raised questions as to how the project to deconstruct Whiteness benefit students of color academically or socially (Hernandez-Sheets 2000). Another scholar, Jones, was moved to trouble the racial presuppositions of critical pedagogy. She questioned whether or not cross-racial dialogue was as compelling educationally to students of color as it has been to White students and White professors (Jones 1999). Another critique stemming from the field of critical pedagogy recognized that one's knowledge about another can only be partial may correct for epistemic arrogance in cross-racial dialogue, but questioned if this principle could translate into a pedagogical intervention that could lead students of color to a place of personal empowerment and academic achievement (Ellsworth 1989; Razack 1998). Many scholar-practitioners of antiracist education and educators in general have their own ideas about the best and the worst of pedagogical practices. Yet they rarely consider that students of color may be looking to fulfill a set of needs that are different from those of White mainstream students.

In this chapter, I discuss how the students of color in my study often entered college classrooms hoping to experience an education that examined race-related issues and addressed people of color in humanized ways. Not only did students find that race-related topics were largely omitted from the standard curriculum, but also that when race was addressed it was often discussed in decontextualized and stereotypical ways. This chapter explores how the course curriculum, classroom interactions and the impact of predominantly White students unfolded to marginalize, tokenize, and stigmatize students of color. Students of color were typically relegated to three main roles: *the cultural spokesperson*, *the interventionist*, and *the angry minority*. At times, students of color often stepped into these roles to oblige the requests of White mainstream professors and students who wanted to hear personal testimonies about the experience of being a person of color. Other times these labels were projected onto students of color who tried to correct misinformation about people of color. I will examine how students of color were impacted by those roles and their reflections on how those roles were ingrained within White-dominated classrooms. I conclude with a discussion of the importance of students of color creating their own self-defined standpoints in White-dominated classrooms. An examination of their testimonies demonstrated that they had already taken necessary steps towards self-defining measures.

The Cultural Spokesperson

One of the most common racialized roles that students of color were pressed into playing was that of the *Cultural Spokesperson*. This role was most likely to

develop in classes in which topics related to race and diversity were excluded from the curriculum or addressed in decontextualized and tokenized ways. In White-dominated classrooms, White mainstream professors and students frequently turned to students of color to fill in the curricular gaps. Rather than asking if there were students with academic training in a particular race-related field of study, professors and students made requests for students of color to give candid accounts of their real life experiences with race, racism, culture and other diversity related issues. Students of color were positioned to donate their personal and sometimes painful testimonies to compensate for the absence of relevant course material or the instructor's knowledge. For example, John explained how he was often called upon in White-dominated classrooms to make up for what is missing in the course curriculum:

> The other experience that I often have is that in these classes we'll have one day where we talk about people of color as a collective, and then since we're at a very White university, and there aren't very many people of color in the classroom, professors tend to single us out, and say, "Well what are your experiences," like we're expected to kind of share our own life for the benefit of the rest of the students in the class. And so it goes from either not being acknowledged at all, or being tokenized and being expected to speak for all of your people.

John was positioned as a cultural spokesperson when professors asked him to share his personal experiences with the class as though his testimonial was representative of the experiences of all people of color. He explained this positioning as a result of being a racial ethnic minority enrolled in a "very White university" and how that often meant he was one of very few students of color in the classroom. In addition to this institutional context, John attributed this racial positioning to the structure of the curriculum that often attempted to cover race and diversity related topics in one day

out of the entire eighteen-week semester. When professors ignored the differences between and within racial ethnic minority groups and lumped them into one category to be addressed in one day, issues affecting people of color were addressed in decontextualized, fragmented and dehumanized ways. This is a major pedagogical problem because White mainstream students may not understand how such topics relate to the overall curriculum and question why they should be interested or concerned at all about issues that impact people of color. In a similar vein, Bonnie TuSmith explained her view on the challenge of helping White students understand the significance of ethnic literature to the literary canon:

> American education has been one-sided in its presentation of American society, White students often have no other context with which to read and comprehend other cultures. When we [womanists of color] teach ethnic literatures, therefore, we necessarily must serve as "cultural translators" if we expect the material to be understood on its own terms. The task of the instructor is twofold: (1) we must make it possible for monocultural students to *access* other cultures in meaningful ways, and (2) in dealing with the formidable task of bridging cultures…. (TuSmith 1990, 20)

When professors do not take responsibility for being the cultural translator as Bonnie TuSmith described in the above quote, students of color are often called upon to bring balance to the objectified treatment of 'people of color' by disclosing their personal stories. In a pedagogical sense, when students of color gave testimonials about race and racism they were providing knowledge to their classmates and the professor that was absent from the curriculum. Their firsthand account had the effect of appearing to be more "authentic" than textbooks. At first glance, it may appear that John and other students of color were being honored as cultural knowledge-holders, an esteemed position in White-dominated classrooms. The problem with this role was that their knowledge became valued strictly in the context of diversity

issues, and that was predicated on the extent to which they offered up their personal stories as a replacement for a contextualized and comprehensive treatment of issues related to people of color.

One reason why students of color in my study were uncomfortable with the role of cultural spokesperson was that they were developing an awareness of the differences among people from the same racial ethnic minority background. Even though they maintained a strong identification with their respective racial ethnic minority groups, they were careful to recognize that factors such as skin color, socioeconomic class, gender, sexuality and nationality led to important differences in social status and life experience. Student research participants often spoke as a *member* of a particular racial ethnic minority group but avoided speaking on behalf of an entire group or for all people of color. For example, Oscar's classmates insisted that he present the findings of their group project to the entire class. Oscar surmised that the reason why his classmates elected him was because he was Chicano and they assumed he had been a Mexican migrant worker like the protagonist in the book on which they had to present. Oscar reflected on their insistence:

> And so kind of what happened there was when we were reading the book ...And I think at some point it talked about experiences she [the author] had as a migrant worker... we split up into two groups in the class, and it was like, these people [other classmates] are going to talk about this subject and what happened in the book, and we were going to talk about that, and honestly, all the kids are just like, "What does this mean? You [Oscar] should know." … And I was like, honestly all it says in the book is that this and this happened, and they were like, "Oh, okay, well you're the one who's going to talk when our group presents." And I was like, okay [tone of surprise and reluctance], and I remembered thinking, "This is just something stupid, why am I the one who has to present." And so that happened, and I don't know, the professor almost looked at me with these real sympathetic eyes, like, "Oh I know what

> you've been through," and I was like, me and my family have never been migrant farm workers, I don't know what it's like to be a migrant farm worker at all.

In this case, Oscar's classmates assumed that he had a certain body of knowledge and experience because of his Chicano background. Therefore, the students pressed Oscar to speak from a knowledge base they thought that they lacked or could not access experientially. Even though Oscar tried to explain that the author was writing about an experience he had never had personally, his classmates persisted. When he discussed the book in class, he noticed the professor looking at him sympathetically as though he also thought that Oscar was speaking from personal experience. This kind of positioning sometimes works to advantage students by evoking an emotional response from the professor and also putting forth personal experience as a type of undisputable knowledge. However, this racial positioning did not make Oscar feel valued or empowered by his peers and the professor. It troubled him because he was able to recognize the assumptions that were being made about his racial ethic identity and how it positioned in relation to the class. In reality, Oscar felt as though he and his classmates had acquired equal amounts of knowledge about migrant works based on having read the text assigned in class. Although Oscar tried to tell the class that he did not have first-hand knowledge about migrant workers, they did not listen to him. Since Oscar could not and did not offer his classmates and professor experiential knowledge about migrant workers, he was not able to fulfill their desire to hear a first-hand account of the subject. Nonetheless, they all proceeded to interact with Oscar as if he had been a migrant worker himself. This is similar to Alison Jones'(1999) case study that demonstrated the desire of White Pakeha students to know the other by interrogating Maori students and asking them to reveal

their personal stories. Jones concluded that 'dialogue across difference' was a desire on the part of Whites to know about the Other, and was less compelling and productive educationally for students of color. In Oscar's case he was not able to provide them with experience-based knowledge, but the professor and students still persisted in positioning him as a cultural spokesperson. In this case he could not provide them with access to cultural knowledge, only his bodily presence as a Chicano. Thus, not only were false assumptions made about his experience as a Chicano but he was objectified as a man of color.

Even when professors structure their curriculum to include information related to race and racially subjugated groups, they often do so in compartmentalized ways. In other words, professors often fail to provide a historical background for understanding how topics such as the Black Power movement and the American Indian Movement relate to mainstream historical narratives, to one another as social movements, and to the overall class curriculum. This kind of decontextualized treatment was problematic for several students in this study because they identified strongly with their racial background and at the same time were developing a sense of their gender, sexual, and class-based identities. Many students wanted to understand how the multiple facets of their identity had been addressed in academia. John elaborated on the frustrations of examining nonmainstream identities from an approach that bracketed out one or two social identities for discussion:

> I can't say that all aspects of my identity have ever been represented at one time, but different aspects of my identity have definitely been addressed in classrooms. And I guess it's kind of like two sides of the same coin. On one hand I feel, I usually feel kind of down about it, because it's usually not built into the curriculum as part of like, a regular part of our class. It's usually, "This week, we're going to discuss," you know, like for example in Gender

> Studies courses, a lot of times we go through all the feminist theory, and all of a sudden then we would do Chicana feminism one week, and instead of having the experience of women of color being built in from the beginning and all throughout the course, or discussing different aspects or different points of view within feminism, on each different subject, like we're assigned one week. And so we're often assigned one week on Asian people, we're often assigned one week on LGBT people, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender people. But, you know, it's disappointing in that aspect, that my experience and my life is not built into the courses that I'm taking, you know, it's kind of just this part that's tacked on at some point.

According to John, one important limitation of a curriculum that takes a fragmented approach to addressing the knowledge of subjugated people is that it fails to speak to John's experience as a student who identifies as a mixed-race boychick. This is not to say that John wanted to talk about his personal experiences in class per se, but that he yearned for an education that would help him understand the social significance of his identity. Furthermore, John found that in classes where the examination of subjugated groups was done in compartmentalized ways, he was still called upon to supplement the curriculum by disclosing his personal experience:

> At the same time, I feel excited that at least something I've experienced in my own life is actually going to be discussed at all, rather than just completely ignored throughout the whole course. So I get excited, I also get worried, I get nervous, a little bit anxious going into that class knowing that that's what's on the syllabus and that's what our readings were about, and we're going to be discussing it. Because, you know, I always get that fear that now people are going to expect me to either be the expert on it and just know everything about what we just read, or they're going to ask me to really share experiences that maybe in the past were very hurtful to me, and they want me to relive these and share them for their benefit. You know, maybe just something that I don't necessarily feel like I'm willing to do all the time. So I guess overall, I wish that different experiences were just built into the curriculum in general, rather than being one specific week this is all we're going to focus on. … I mean, it is sometimes just nice to hear your own story being told.

In these cases John was not necessarily called on to provide knowledge that was absent, but instead to validate the curriculum. In the role of cultural spokesperson,

John and other students of color were not only expected to speak on behalf of various racial ethnic groups but also to be academic experts. This put pressure on students when they were called upon to fulfill these roles but did not have the academic training in that particular field of study. On the other hand, being able to fulfill this role created anxiety of a different kind. John worried that the professor and classmates would ask him to disclose personal stories that held painful memories. In these cases, the telling of personal stories was far from cathartic. It could easily become traumatic to ask students to relive experiences of violence and hurt. Such stories might play a powerful role in confirming the persistence and insidiousness of racism to White mainstream students. However, the educational benefit for students of color has remained unclear, and there may actually be a serious emotional cost if they oblige.

John and Oscar's reflections have demonstrated how the curriculum in predominantly White classrooms positioned them as the cultural spokesperson whether race-related topics were excluded or included from the class discussion. When race-related topics were excluded from the curriculum, students of colors' personal stories and students' physical presence became the cultural text to be consumed by their professors and classmates. When race-related issues were discussed in class, they were often covered in a single class session or allotted to a one-week section. One problem with this was that a multifaceted topic such as race and identity was condensed in a way that nullified the complexities of the issue. So while race may get covered in college classrooms, it can be counterproductive for it to be presented in an essentialized, objectified, decontextualized format. Then the

burden is placed on students of color to "flesh it out" by using their own personal testimonies of race, identity and oppression to infuse these topics with vitality and relevancy.

While students of color in my study wanted to talk about the issues that impact racially subjugated people, they did not necessarily want to stand in as the spokesperson for all subjugated people everywhere or be subjugated themselves in the classroom. They often acknowledged that they were not authorized to be a representative of their racial ethnic minority group or qualified to speak to more specialized issues such as child rearing practices in Black families. John and Oscar seemed to be calling for a curriculum that addressed race-related issues through a lens of intersectionality that is similar to the stance that Patricia Hill Collins articulated in Black Feminist Thought against the additive approach to studying oppression:

> Instead of starting with gender and then adding in other variables such as age, sexual orientation, race, social class, and religion, Black Feminist Thought sees these distinctive systems of oppression as being part of one overarching structure of domination…a system of interlocking race, class, and gender oppression expands the focus of analysis from merely describing the similarities and differences distinguishing these systems of oppression and focuses greater attention on how they interconnect. Assuming that each system needs the other in order to function. (Collins 1990, 554)

Approaching the curriculum through the lens of intersectionality would de-compartmentalize subjugated knowledge and examine how race, class, gender and sexuality for example function within a system in which all these forms of oppression are interlocked. Furthermore, the lens of intersectionality would bring to bear how multiple oppressions function on the individual, institutional, relational and discursive level. Integrating the complexities of race-related issues into the

mainstream curriculum would fill the knowledge gap so that students of colors' personal stories would no longer be needed to illuminate and validate the connection between diversity issues, mainstream society and the mainstream curriculum. Additionally, professors would need to take it upon themselves to address White mainstream students' desires to hear firsthand accounts of racism. Relieved from playing the role of the cultural spokesperson as a supplement to a Eurocentric or a multicultural curriculum, students of color would be able to concentrate on their own educational experience rather than carrying the responsibility of teaching their peers and professors, and taking up the additional burden of recovering from the painful experiences of self-disclosure.

The Interventionist

Another shortcoming of classrooms that attempted to address race-related topics was that derogatory and stereotypical depictions of people of color were often posited through the curriculum and in class discussion. When faced with these negative images, several student research participants felt compelled to present alternative viewpoints. Their aim was to provide knowledge that would bring racial and cultural issues into a socio-historical context and promote humanized images of people of color. I refer to this role as *The Interventionist* because students of color interjected culturally-oriented knowledge into class discussions for the purpose of correcting false information about racial ethnic minorities and changing the

direction of dialogue to be more inclusive of subjugated groups. Their goal was to debunk the racially assumptive ways in which their professors and classmates were thinking and talking about racial ethnic minorities.

The role of interventionist created a predicament because students of color wanted to dispel myths and stereotypes about racial ethnic minority groups, but to contest the curriculum and the remarks of professors and classmates may have cost them personally, academically, and socially. The majority of negative statements made by their classmates and the professor were directed towards an entire racial ethnic minority group – directly or indirectly, rather than personal attacks against individual students of color. However, students' strong identification as members of a particular racial ethnic minority groups made it difficult for them to separate themselves from the generalized statement. Thus, the student was forced to decide between two undesirable modes of response and participation -- to speak out or to remain silent. Speaking out held the potential of relegating them to the role of *cultural spokesperson* or the more stigmatized role of *the angry minority* that I will describe in the next section. While silence might have allowed them to bypass these roles, it also could have positioned them as complicit to the reproduction of racial stereotypes and myths. Catalina talked about this dilemma:

> I took a multicultural education class …and it was a really White dominant class. There were three Latinas, an American Indian, and I think two Latinos. This one [White] girl raised her hand and said, "I just can't understand why on applications people can get more if they're a person of color." Well I don't think she said it like that, she said it more negatively. But I don't know, and the teacher was like, "this is a good point". So there are assumptions that people make, but she didn't really address the underlying thought that students of color get more scholarships, so I had to raise my hand and say, "You know, only ninety-six percent of scholarships, or sorry, ninety-six percent of scholarships go to White students, whereas three to four

> percent go to students of color." So, I don't know, I don't like being placed in those situations, because for one thing, you might, I remember in high school, way back when one of my church members started complaining about Wendy's [fast food restaurant] and how everyone there spoke Spanish and why can't they learn English. I didn't say anything, and I still regret it, because I really wish I would have said something. So I don't want to not say anything, but on the other hand, it just gets tiring because then they turn to you and go, "Well, what about this," or, "What about affirmative action, isn't that race-based," or, so, I don't know, it's like a Catch-22.

The dilemma presented by the Interventionist's role was that if students of color did not speak up they felt like they were allowing negative stereotypes to be spread without contestation. If they did speak then their classmates and professors began to rely on them as the cultural spokesperson on all race-related issues. Students of color in my study did not want to passively slip into a role of complicity, nor did they want to take on the unreasonable and unrealistic expectation that they could answer all of their classmates' race questions. They wanted to participate in class discussion on their own terms by raising questions about issues they wanted to explore further and respond to issues they were prepared and compelled to defend.

In those cases when student research participants chose to speak out they were met with various reactions from both students and professors. Eva described an encounter she had with fellow classmates in her Psychology class:

> I was in a psychology class and we were discussing child development, and were discussing about how, oh - weight management and obesity. And I said something, we were in a group and we had to discuss how was obesity triggered, or what are some components of obesity, and I had said:
>
> Eva: I think a component of obesity is your ethnicity.
>
> White Female Classmate: How does ethnicity have to do with your obesity?

Eva: Because culturally there are different types of food you eat, number one and number two, the way we're built and the way you're built are totally different. We're built to have bigger things, we're built to be a little bit bigger, to be thicker, you know, and not look stereotypically skinny and tall like you guys are?

White Female Classmate: I don't think that has anything to do with it, I think culturally, yeah, the food thing I can understand, but they can eat different foods, they can compensate their corn or whatever for something else, you know, it's not that big of a deal.

Eva: Yeah, but you do have to understand that's probably one of the reasons why they're that big, because of what they eat, you know, and you can't expect everyone to eat just this one dish every day, and then everyone just have it, you know, that's not culturally how that works.

And so I just, after that I was just like, I don't know what to do. I really don't. I was just like, I hate psychology because they only think of the individual and not the group…. And how their whole racial background has a lot to do with how they're affected individually.

In this exchange between classmates, Eva attempted to examine the role of culture as a factor in obesity cases. Her aim was to move the analysis of her White classmates from a Eurocentric paradigm and consider the impact of social and cultural factors. Despite the increasing and disproportionate prevalence of obesity in African American, American Indian, Pacific Islander and Latino communities, Eva's classmates dismissed her hypothesis altogether. I asked Eva to say more about how the conversation unfolded between her and the students in the psychology class, and if the tone was conversational or confrontational. She recalled:

It was in the classroom, there was about four or five of us in the group, and the way she said it, like I was just trying to say it casually, because we had to

> give out ideas of what we thought, and I was just saying it casually. Then she was just like:
>
> White Female Classmate 1: "I don't think that has anything to do with it," and then she had some other girl that was her friend, I don't know, and she was just like yeah, kind of agreeing with her:
>
> White Female Classmate 2: "I don't think that has anything to do with it."
>
> So then after it felt like an attack on what I had said. So then after that, being in that classroom I kind of just kept my mouth shut. I never really expressed anything because when I try to bring in the thought of maybe something's ethnically wrong, they would kind of talk about socioeconomic status, but they would never talk about racially. So after that I was like, I'm done with psychology… I like analyzing people and stuff like that, but if you don't, if you can't think of the whole picture, then how are you expecting to help this one person? You know? That's why I was just like, I can't do this. And to go to a class every day, and these people are trying to think that they're trying to help others, but they don't want to see the whole picture.

Eva's statement was not intended to debunk her classmate's views, but rather sought to expand understanding of the topic. However, her remarks were not taken seriously. Furthermore, Eva recognized that the defensiveness was not necessarily directed to her personally. Still she realized that she was examining issues from a racial, cultural lens that was apparently oppositional and unwelcomed. This brought Eva to the recognition that she would continually encounter the tension between a Eurocentric approach and a culturally sensitive one if she remained a psychology major. She decided to change her major to mathematics where she thought she could avoid these racial dynamics. In her own words, Eva explained:

> I would like to be a psychology major, but just like, it's so, there's so many people in that major that I think it would be hard. And then number two, they're so, what's the word, they're so naïve and it just makes me mad because they don't want to see things there, they don't want to see things what other people think. It's like, once they're in the psychology major, they feel that whatever they say is the right thing.

By speaking up to interject an alternative viewpoint, Eva found that classmates disagreed with her. Their disagreement was not the problem, but the dismissal of Eva's remarks sent a powerful message that the classroom was a space where she would be deterred from exploring, critiquing or shaping her ideas. Participants' interventions were not always successful and sometimes the results profoundly changed their course of study at the university.

During the interview, I wondered if Eva's experience in Psychology classes took place only in the context of interactions with classmates or if she had similar experiences with professors. She responded by talking about an experience she had when she visited her professor during office hours.

> I did talk to her [the professor] once and I could see how biased, she was like, 'I know,' because I had told her something about my mother and why I couldn't come to a test because my mother was sick. And she was really sick, and that I had to stay home and watch my brother and sisters. So she goes, "Oh," she was like, "Yeah, I know, African American parents usually da-da-da" and I was like, "My mom's not African American, she's Hispanic." And she's like, "Oh, well…[in a tone of embarassment]" and I'm just like, "Oh, but it's okay, don't worry about it, everybody thinks that, don't worry about it." Like in a way I felt like just leaving her and being like, yeah, what are you going to say now, but at the same time I'm like, I felt like I had put her on the spot and she was going to be sad…. I felt bad, I guess you could say. I was just like, "Oh it's okay, don't worry about it." But then even now, when I went to go talk to her once she was just like, "Yeah, I know how, it must be hard being African American," and just bringing up my race so many times and I was just like, see, I can't do this.

The professor assumed that Eva was African American because of Eva's visible appearance. Furthermore the professor assumed certain knowledge about African American culture and surmised that Eva's Black heritage was grounds for sympathy. Eva intervened by correcting the professor's assumption about her identity. In doing so, the professor became embarrassed. The catch-22 of Eva's intervention was that

she was able to make the correction, but the professor's disappointment over her own failed attempt at empathy affected Eva. Eva began to feel as though she should take care of her professor's ego and emotions. Unfortunately, the professor continued to misidentify Eva's racial heritage and bring it up at inappropriate times. I asked Eva if she had an idea as to why the professor would bring up race so often in their conversations. She replied:

> Because I notice a lot of times they bring up your race to try to identify with you, to think that they're on the same page with you, that they understand, but they don't. …Well when I went into her, I went into the class to talk to her, to her office to talk to her about my grades, to kind of get a feel for how I was doing in the class. And so then that's when she brought up, like, "Oh," you know, "Yeah, I know it must be hard being African American, or, you know there's probably a lot of things you have to deal with. I was just like, you know, like I'm glad you kind of understand, but at the same time, why are you singling me out during this conversation when I just want to know about my grades.

Apparently, the professor was trying to relate and empathize with Eva. However, there was a major disconnect because the professor made a false assumption about Eva's racial identity and even after Eva corrected her, the professor continued to repeat the mistake. Also, Eva expressed bewilderment and discomfort that the professor focused the discussion on race when their meeting had been initiated to gauge her academic progress in the class.

Although Eva wanted to study Psychology, she was frustrated about being shut out of class discussion and having a racial identity projected onto her. Eva changed her major to Mathematics because she saw it as an academic subject where she could avoid dealing with these racialized roles and issues that left her marginalized, silenced and misidentified in the classroom. In a similar situation, Makini decided to remain a major in Health studies even though she was one of few

undergraduate students of color in the entire department. Makini took on the role of interventionist by attempting to bring a contextualized understanding to the racially generalized conclusions that students and professors made about various racial ethnic minority groups. Makini described her experiences as the interventionist:

> I hate my major more than I could ever explain, just because a lot of the students and even the faculty don't have a working knowledge of issues of diversity, like, in any facet… And so, when the professors teach a lesson, they don't ever address things… so I had to take an Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs class, and so we just learn about the policy and all that stuff behind it. And the teacher would say things like, "There are more Black people in jail for drug offenses than White people," or, "More Native Americans are alcoholics than White people," and she would just say these really broad, and albeit they are true, but she never would address the issues behind that, and why that happens. And so when students would raise their hands and say things, it automatically becomes very, very combative. Like for me, because generally, I think I'm one of maybe three other African Americans in the major-- in the Department, and so students will start commenting on that, "Well, why do Indians drink so much," and they start saying the most ignorant things, but the teacher doesn't have the knowledge to mediate the conversation.

In the classroom, Makini interjected statements that she hoped would help provide a social-historical context to her classmates' superficial understanding of issues such as the high and rapidly increasing incarceration rate of African American males and the prevalence of alcoholism in American Indian communities. Makini was effectively filling in the gap of the professor's lack of knowledge as well as a pedagogical gap by taking on the responsibility of instruction, albeit momentary. Makini elaborated on the dynamics she faced in the role of interventionist:

> And so automatically, it [class discussion] just turns into something that's laden with stereotypes because the students have no clue what's going on. And then so, I can't stand it, and I think it's just because I like to question things and I think sometimes the teacher feels really challenged by me being in the classroom, and I feel like a lot of times I end up doing her job or his job because sometimes I'll just let it go, like, let all the ignorant comments go and then just sit there in silence, but then I feel like that's more costly to me

> to not say anything. So if I do say anything, then I'm [perceived as being] angry or I'm challenging and things of that nature.

Makini found that her intervention made the professor feel that her or his authority was being usurped by having a student impart knowledge to the class, especially knowledge that may elaborate on or contradict a statement that the professor had posited. This struggle over authority, control and knowledge can become a source of contention between the student interventionist and the professor. For example, Arianna posed an intervention that put her at odds with her professor. Arianna told her professor that a class assignment was problematic. The assignment required students to do a service learning project with youth from marginalized groups. Arianna explained what happened when she questioned the teacher's assignment:

> She [the professor] assigned a paper to describe a time when you felt like the 'Other' in the community, and so I totally wrote about her class, and she graded it, but I don't know if she really got it, or if she was just like, "Oh, here goes Arianna again," you know?
>
> And then another paper, our service paper, was about 'humanizing the Other' so [the assignment involved] volunteering at West High and Northwest Middle School which is like the Latino Latina community. So the last day of class we talked about it, and I go:
>
> Arianna: I don't know how I'm supposed to humanize my own race.
>
> Professor: [*in an offended tone*] Well, why don't you tell me?
>
> Arianna: I'm not the one that assigned the assignment, so you need to figure it out, but you can't pick and pull what race you want to humanize.
>
> Professor: Well, I don't know what to do, and I'm sorry that you feel this way.
>
> Arianna: You cater to middle class White students. I mean, you didn't

> even think about what a person of color would think about this assignment when you're reading and in the service, you should be humanizing someone that you would not interact with [quotes the assignment description], well, I interact with my people every day, so are you saying I'm not human?

Arianna questioned the professor's decision to design an assignment that assumed that every student in the classroom was a member of White mainstream society with little to no contact with people of color. The service learning project dispersed students to predominantly Latino-serving schools to learn about and humanize 'the Other'. The assignment put Arianna in a pedagogical predicament where she was asked to humanize a racial ethnic minority with whom she herself identified as her own racial background and already human. By designing the curriculum under the conscious or unconscious assumption that all students would be from the dominant group, the professor alienated Arianna from the educational objectives of the assignment. When Arianna verbalized her frustrations about the racially biased premise and purpose of the assignment, Arianna risked alienating herself from the professor. In Arianna's case, she and the professor remained at odds for the duration of the semester. Arianna continued to take on the role of interventionist by pointing out the ways in which class assignments and the treatment she received from the professor and classmates was racially hostile. By playing the role of interventionist, Arianna's classmates eventually began to label her as the *Angry Minority*, the final role I will discuss in this chapter.

The Interventionist and 'Talking Back'

In analyzing the characteristics and context for students of color who take on the Interventionist role, I draw upon the concept of 'talking back' from the

framework of Black Feminist Theory. bell hooks explained that in her southern Black community, "back talk" was when a child daringly spoke to an authority as an equal. "It meant daring to disagree and sometimes it just meant having an opinion" (hooks 1989, 5). This was especially looked down upon if the child was a girl whose penchant for talking back held no possibility of public good as compared to a boy child whose bold speech was treated as a divine calling to become a preacher. Talking back is not the casual act of voicing one's opinion, instead "it is an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges politics of domination that would render us nameless and voiceless" (hooks 1989, 8). For some Black women this has meant recognizing that they were in a subjugated position, and despite that fact freeing themselves to talk to people with more social power and status. Furthermore, the content of what is spoken is an important aspect of this concept. Talking back is an act of resistance, in part because Black women have used the knowledge and experience they have acquired as members of subjugated groups and within the humanizing space of their own families and communities to debunk the supremacy of White mainstream views and values. There is another level of defiance when Black women speak with an authority that has been denied to them by mainstream society and by some Black cultural traditions, and because the knowledge they posit is oppositional.

When Catalina, Eva, Makini, and Arianna stepped into the interventionist role they were granting themselves the authority to talk back to White mainstream students and professors, and White mainstream views about racial ethnic minorities. Their examples demonstrated how students attempted to insert subjugated

knowledge into class discussions as a way of balancing the curriculum and the dynamics of classroom interaction that decontextualized and dehumanized people of color, and dismissed the educational concerns of students of color. Their interventions were geared towards disrupting racial assumptions made about them and other members of racial ethnic minority groups. Student research participants interjected their knowledge that was (1) from a marginalized standpoint, (2) offered a social historical understanding of social problems, and (3) was often considered oppositional to the views of White mainstream professors and students. By talking back, students of color were trying to protect themselves against the racial subjugation they faced in the college classroom through "an act of risk and daring" (hooks 1989, 5). After talking back on several occasions, Eva decided she did not want to deal with the stress of being positioned in an oppositional role in relation to her classmates and the professor. She gave up her dream to be a Psychologist and majored in mathematics instead. Arianna remained committed to talking back in class and eventually was stigmatized as "the angry minority." Her relationship with the professor and students grew increasingly contentious which she suspected had an effect on her final grade in the class. The costs to students of color for talking back were high and did not always pay off towards their objectives to alter the course of class discussion, contribute knowledge about race-related issues, and "to have a voice" (hooks 1989, 5).

The Angry Minority

Students of color were labeled as 'angry' when they disagreed with mainstream views or expressed perspectives that took oppositional stances to that of

the mainstream. The *Angry Minority* role often resulted in stigmatizing a student, thus alienating them from classmates, instructor and academic dialogue. Some student research participants found that they were often labeled as the angry minority in classes that addressed diversity topics (e.g., Immigration). In these cases, student research participants were labeled "angry" when they presented a view that incorporated a critical perspective on race. In other words, students addressed issues such as racial inequality and racism rather than promoting a colorblind or cultural difference view of diversity.

Students in this study often expressed excitement about enrolling in courses where diversity was the main topic. The professional goals and academic interests of several students were geared towards serving as advocates for communities of color. Additionally, as they began to have more and more experiences of being racially subjugated on campus, in residential halls, and in the classroom, they wanted to learn a conceptual language that would help them articulate their experiences, concerns, and counterarguments against racism. They eventually found that once in these classes their educational goals and marginalized standpoints on race-related issues were incongruent with those of most professors and students. Students of color who identified as racial ethnic minorities wanted to discuss the politics and history of racial inequality and racial justice in the U.S. Conversely, many of their classmates and professors were aligned with cultural difference models that recognized various racial ethnic groups but did not consider the implications of societal power and privilege. In these kinds of classes, Jarihd found that in discussing his views of race

and diversity, he was labeled as the angry minority while White students were given positive reinforcement for their racially ignorant and hostile views:

> The obvious ones are like the diversity classes. And generally you have to take the 101 Diversity classes [as a university requirement for graduation]. And so you have to take those with White students, which is not fun. And it's because no matter you'll say an experience in class, and it will always be questioned and pretty much denied. And they will work so hard in denying that experience no matter what. And so you have to prove so hard that that happened, like this experience happened, like this is how I feel on a day to day basis on campus. Also, in the classrooms, before like most of the time I wouldn't even talk just because if I talked I'd be labeled as that angry minority or that angry person or something like that. And so I just kept silent. And it seems like the White students can just say whatever they want, they can say any shit they want and it will be valued. Even professors of color will value it even if it's what the Whites shouldn't say. And they'll be like, oh, thank you for sharing that comment, or something like that. And it seems like they don't get called on what they say. And, so when it's someone like me who says a comment, I'm called out immediately by the other White students on what I say.

Jarihd explained that students enrolled in introductory-level diversity classes because they were required to by the university as opposed to those students who voluntarily enrolled in such classes because of academic, professional or personal interest. When Jarihd voiced his critical race perspectives White classmates demanded that he provide evidence of the truthfulness and validity of his experiences. In other words, he was asked to prove to his classmates that his experiences really occurred and that his perception of what happened was rational and valid. By taking a critical race perspective he was often labeled as the "angry minority." To avoid this title, Jarihd sometimes chose to remain silent in class.

Jarihd may have assumed that having a professor of color instructing a course on diversity would lead to discussions about race in which a greater variety of viewpoints were encouraged and considered admissible. He may have even

expected that a professor of color would validate his critical race perspective. Instead, Jarihd discovered that the professor of color did not take a stand in support of his claims, nor did he challenge White students when they made racist remarks. Faced with a situation in which his perspective on diversity was treated as hostile towards mainstream views and members of White mainstream society, and the racist views of White students were tolerated and even applauded, Jarihd realized that a professor of color was not guaranteed protection against racial subjugation in the college classroom.

Rather than being discouraged from taking on the role of the angry minority, Oscar thought that his professor wanted him to play that role for educational purposes. In a class entitled Neighborhood Democracy, the White male professor continually looked to Oscar to analyze course topics from the critical perspective of a person of color:

> Oscar: There's also times in class where it's not so obvious, I think. I have a class [Neighborhood Democracy] now where, it's a political science class, and it's just the professor kind of like, he'll call my name out and he'll say, "What do you think," and I think one of the reasons why he does that is because in the beginning of class, and when that class started, we were, you know, just covering the introductory stuff, and I would kind of always be the person who was like, "Oh, well this person didn't acknowledge this," that sort of thing. …And so when we're reading about neighborhood democracy and those sorts of things, obviously it gets kind of boring and repetitive, so we're kind of just sitting there and he [the professor] wants it to be like a discussion class, like a class where you have discussions and nobody's saying anything. So he always kind of goes, "Oscar, what do you think about this?" And sometimes I will be like, "If you really want to know what I think, this is what I think." But then there's just like nothing… And then he moves on, but he's honestly done that like three times, and I'm just like, "I don't care." And if I do have a really strong opinion about what the book is talking about I'll say it, but … he's just like, "Oscar, what do you think?" And I'm just like, grrrr.

Deanna: Do you think he calls on you because

Oscar: Can I tell you why?

Deanna: Yeah, yeah.

Oscar: I think he just wants to hear the angry brown person perspective, and so he'll kind of be like, "So what do you think, Angry Brown Man," does that make sense?

In this case, the professor solicited Oscar's response to course topics because he knew that Oscar's perspective presented an alternative view from the readings and other classmates. While it seemed as though the professor wanted to hear Oscar's views, he was not prepared to engage in an inquiry or dialogue around those views. This was frustrating to Oscar because he was repeatedly called upon to speak but rarely got a response from either classmates or the professor. Oscar suspected that the professor was anticipating that Oscar's remarks would be controversial enough to spark class discussion that the professor was not able to initiate himself. Oscar was repeatedly put in a position to facilitate an educational experience for his classmates, an experience that did not necessarily move Oscar closer towards his own academic and professional goals. Oscar went on to explain how the course readings played a part in defining his role as the Angry Brown man:

> One of the books that we have is a sampling of a town in Vermont, and how their neighborhood council works. …And so he [the professor] kind of knows that I'll bring in race, because what I have said in the past when I raised my hand. You know, the author, she makes it sound like, you know, everybody can just get along in a neighborhood counsel. But I was like, "That works in a really homogenous society," but I was like, "Of course the reality is even if you look at Salt Lake, it's not like a homogenous society anymore; you have strong ethnic divide and strong religion divide." So I was like, "Can you really see Salt Lake coming together and being all friendly with each other?" I'm like, "No, of course that's not going to happen, because of several issues." And so he's [professor] like,"Okay, I understand what you mean," and so now when it's [class discussion] kind of moving

> towards that, because the book doesn't take race into account at all, it's just this[number of] many males were there, this many females, how old they were, blah, blah, blah. And so it's kind of almost like he knows everybody will kind of like have a really honky dory opinion about the book; they'll be like, "Oh, well I understand what she's saying," blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And for me it's like, "Yeah, well I get what she's saying, but I don't think it works; she's living in some far-off world, or a world that we don't know about.

Oscar indicated that the texts used in class provided a racially neutral description of council members, and while gender was accounted for it was presented as quantifiable data that merely describes the members' background. Oscar's remarks in class demonstrated that he did not view gender and race as descriptors of little importance to the council's functioning. He implied that in U.S. society gender and race function within a system of stratification. Therefore Oscar took into consideration that council members from diverse gender and racial backgrounds might be engaged in tensions and struggles for power within the group. In this class Oscar was positioned as the angry minority because he debunked the myth of colorblindness espoused in the texts and the myth of racial harmony assumed by his classmates and the professor.

The Challenge of Speaking Critical Race Perspectives

The Angry Minority role differs from the Interventionist. Rather than positing information that contextualized and problematized the issues already being raised in class, the Angry Minority label was reserved for students who spoke directly to the political and interpersonal tensions generated by the various forms of racism. Furthermore, when students of color gave voice to critical perspectives about race they were seen as not only presenting an alternative view on topics

discussed in class but also as challenging the legitimacy, rationality and virtue of White mainstream racial paradigms (e.g., colorblindness, cultural difference). Thus students of color were identified as antagonists towards White mainstream society. In the case of Jarihd and Arianna who was eventually labeled as the angry minority, they were viewed as saboteurs to social interaction and academic progress in the classroom.

Based on her experiences as a graduate student of color, bell hooks talked about the challenge of speaking critical race perspectives in predominantly White classrooms:

> During graduate school, White students would tell me that it was important not to question, challenge, or resist. Their tolerance level seemed much higher than my own or that of other Black students. Critically reflecting on the differences between us, it was apparent that many White students were from privileged class backgrounds. Tolerating the humiliations and degradations we were subjected to in graduate school did not radically call into question their integrity, their sense of self-worth. Those of us who were coming from underprivileged class backgrounds, who were Black, often were able to attend college only because we had consistently defied those who had attempted to make us believe we were smart but not "smart enough"; guidance counselors who refused to tell us about certain colleges because they already knew we would not be accepted; parents who were not necessarily supportive of graduate work, etc. White students were not living daily in a world outside campus life where they also had to resist degradation, humiliation. To them, tolerating forms of exploitation and domination in graduate school did not evoke images of a lifetime spent tolerating abuse. They would endure certain forms of domination and abuse, accepting it as an initiation process that would conclude when they became the person in power. (hooks 1989, 58-59)

For many students in my study, tolerating and remaining silent when faced with racist student remarks, race neutral texts and racially biased assignments was as much of a challenge as talking back. They knew that their capacity to endure racial subjugation would have to be great because from classroom to classroom, and

residence halls to the city of Salt Lake, there was no end in sight. Jarihd talked about the persistence of racialized roles:

> Those roles are like almost in every classroom setting, especially in the Communication Department, those roles are already created in the class. And so my role is then 'that brown person'. And so I think what would be helpful for faculty would be to understand this, and, and like when they talk about diversity, I don't know how to make it like safe, but at least challenge those White students, and not have to rely on me to have to put something in there or look at me to lead that discussion, because I won't.

Jarihd recognized that it may not be possible for any classroom to be free from racism. Still he maintained hope that racism as a topic could be interrogated and that the responsibility and risks for doing so would not be placed upon him.

Racialized Roles Among Students of Color

Difficult racial dynamics were not only created between students of color and White students. Tense racial dynamics sometimes emerged between students of color. Students of color are not a monolithic group. They come from different racial ethnic backgrounds, and even students with the same racial ethnic background are likely to express their cultural upbringing differently. Some students of color take on the politicized identity as a member of a racial ethnic minority group. Other students of color may identify strongly with White mainstream society or are afraid of the ramifications for not assimilating. Students of color in this study talked about their attempts to form an alliance with other students of color in the classroom only to discover that they did not share the same standpoint or the desire to form an alliance. Catalina talked about her experience trying to connect with another Latina student in her class:

Catalina: I try to take it [classes] with people I know, so we sort of back each other up and none of us is just that one person who speaks for the entire race. Like I was just telling you about the class dynamics … when I walked in the classroom the first day I immediately sat next to a Latina and we talked, and we sort of formed an ally, even though I don't think she realized it. But I was speaking up, because I need someone to sit there and be like, "Uh huh, I understand where you're coming from with this."

Deanna: Yeah. That sounds like a good strategy.

Catalina: It helps sometimes, but I'm on the UOS scholarship. Utah Opportunity Scholarship with Jackie Baker, and we take an Ethnic Studies class. And you realize the different perspectives everyone has. So this assumption about students of color all think alike, it's wrong. But you want to sit next to them because you just assume, but a lot of times sometimes they say really self-hating things. They say, "You're right, Latino people shouldn't be able to apply based on race," all these different things.

In an effort to bolster herself against racial subjugation in the classroom, Catalina chose a seat next to another Latina student with whom she thought she could build an alliance. She thought the alliance would give her the courage to talk back to racially hostile remarks made in class. However, Catalina began to realize from this and other classes that she could not assume that all Latinas share the same political views and have the same anxieties about predominantly White classrooms. In her view, some students of color had internalized racism and made "self-hating" comments. Jarihd discovered that some students of color relegated him to the role of angry minority:

> It would be easier the more people of color there are who are aware, because that's the key. Because if there's people of color who internalize racism, that's the hardest, that's the hardest thing to have in your class. Like that's like, oh, great, well, there goes my everything. Because then you become the representative for like the angry people of color, because they're the representatives of those people of color who are abiding.

The position that students of color took in the classroom not only varied from White students and White instructors, but also from one another. In this case, Jarihd found that taking a critical stance on race put him in opposition to some students of color in addition to White mainstream students and professors. In the same classroom, there were students of color who did not want to talk about race-related issues or chose to position themselves with mainstream or colorblind views. This differentiation among students of color further confirmed Jarihd to his fellow classmates as the militant contrarian. When positioned against students who were aligned with mainstream views, participants like Jarihd and Arianna who were outspoken about their critical race views were viewed in more exaggerated ways. Their stances were viewed as a conscious, unnecessary decision to be antagonistic.

Zion talked about how she would try to assess the political, intellectual and social stance of students of color when she entered a classroom for the first time. She learned not to make the assumption that they held the same critical perspectives about race. Zion tried to make sense of how people who share the same racial ethnic identity can have different and even diametrically opposing stances on race-related issues**:**

Deanna:	When you go into Ethnic Studies classes, and there are other people of color…Do you think they have the same understanding as you?
Zion:	Huh uh. No, of course not.
Deanna:	Do you get a sense of how they're taking all this in?
Zion:	I don't know. Okay. Are you asking me do I feel like they understand? Or are you asking me do, like what are you asking me like exactly?

Deanna: Yeah, what am I asking you? Well, another student I interviewed…

Zion: Um hum.

Deanna: He talked about how sometimes it's, it's definitely better to not be the only person of color in the room, but he said you still have to figure out where that person of color is, because they may not be conscious about where…

Zion: Um hum. I completely agree with him. Because they may not be consciously aware of what's going on for real. Because they might still be in like oblivion of "it doesn't matter". Because I meet a lot of people like that. And I wish I didn't care anymore. I'm not going to lie. Sometimes I wish I thought it didn't matter. You know what I mean? People have to understand like where they're coming from. And you know, like bell hooks talks about like an oppression measuring stick, right, in one of her books. And I completely agree with it. Like I think there is an oppression measuring stick, because my struggle is not everyone else's struggle.

Interestingly, several students in my study referred to those students of color who identified with White mainstream society as 'invested.' Arianna explained, "We call them 'invested,' when they're still invested in Whiteness a little bit." Arianna talked about a conversation she had with a high school classmate whom she identified as invested in Whiteness. Arianna realized that she and her friend were from the same racial ethnic background and had been friends all throughout high school, but their standpoints and perspectives were distinctly different and at odds:

> Yeah, coming up here one of them was just like, "You're just angry Arianna, you're just angry; that doesn't happen." And I'm like, "You are a Mexican, you are full blooded, how can you say it's not happened when it's happening right here in your class?" And she's like, "No, no," and just in denial. So I was just like, "Oh my god, I need another support system; I need to get away from this crowd because they're not helping me at all."

Classmates of color who were invested in Whiteness often labeled participants as angry minorities. Students in my study learned how to not rely on students of color

with these views as potential allies in warding off racial subjugation in the classroom. Hunter and Nettles recognized that members of racial ethnic minority groups can be oriented to Whiteness "and their adherence to an ideology of colorblindness in all discussions of race" (Hunter and Nettles 1999, 387). They set out to explain how their course about women of color taught by women of color from the standpoint of women of color triggered a defensive reaction on the part of students of color who agreed with White students that the course was biased against White women and not academically sound. Hunter and Nettles came to the conclusion that students of color may identify more strongly with White mainstream society than with their racial ethnic minority heritage:

> The rejection of the ethnic self can occur in many different ways from adopting the speech and style, the physical appearance, and even the psychological perspective or worldview, as we are contending, of the dominant group…It is possible that some students of color adopt the standpoint of Whites because it is easier psychologically than maintaining or developing an oppositional standpoint in the face of White hegemony. (Hunter and Nettles 1999, 391)

When students of color in my study talked back in class, they not only took an oppositional stance to White mainstream professors and classmates and White mainstream societal values and views, but also to those students of color who were oriented to Whiteness.

Self-Defined Standpoints and Transformation in the Classroom

The prevalence of racialized roles acted as high-stakes barriers to students of color who attempted to participate in the social and academic processes of White-dominated classrooms. When the curriculum did not adequately address issues related to diversity and race, professors frequently relied on students of color to fill those gaps by inserting their personal stories and controversial views about race. At times this fulfilled the professors' pedagogical desire to initiate dialogue among students and White students' desires to access 'authentic' stories about life as a racial ethnic minority. However, when research participants posited more critical perspectives about race they took an oppositional stance to White mainstream racial attitudes that insist on the declining significance of race. Thus, students of color were stigmatized as the angry minority. Participants indicated that professors could disrupt these racialized roles by employing a curriculum that addressed the intersectionality of race, class, gender and sexuality in complex, contextualized ways throughout the course.

Along those lines, Patricia Hill Collins (1991) called for curriculum transformation from a Black feminist perspective by replacing the traditional Eurocentric model with knowledge generated by members of historically marginalized groups. Collins referred to this as self-defined knowledge not only because it is produced by and about members of marginalized groups, but also because it treated them as intellectuals who have gained substantial and valuable wisdom in their standpoint as oppressed groups distinctly positioned to gather candid insights into mainstream society. Self-defined knowledge from a subjugated position

challenges dehumanizing images about people of color and decenters knowledge that forwards the interests of elite groups. It does so by taking into account how gender, race, class and sexuality work within interlocking structures of domination. This provides a social and historical context for understanding social problems as opposed to paradigms that view people of color as culturally deficit and racially inferior. Placing knowledge gleaned from self-defined standpoints at the center of the curriculum it can be a powerful tool for instructing students of color in the histories of racial ethnic minorities' struggles over oppression, resistance, activism and liberation.

In a pedagogical sense, this could take the focus off of hearing students' individual stories of culture and race. This Black feminist approach to curriculum places emphasis on systems of domination. The availability and comprehensive nature of this knowledge should be discussed throughout the term offering students of color powerful tools of analysis. Thus rather than disclosing personal stories or interjecting alternative explanations for racially assumptive claims, students of color could be acquiring an education "on themes important in their lives and sharpen their skills of using schooling for their own ends" (Collins 1991, 368).

In addition to building the curriculum from self-defined knowledge, it is also important for students of color to be able to define their own standpoint within predominantly White classrooms. Professors must take responsibility for researching race-related topics of study and facilitating discussions that do not rely on students of color to disclose their personal, painful testimonies. If students of color share their stories it should be at their own discretion and not in response to

appeals from the professor and classmates. When they are pressed into racialized roles the burden of filling in institutional, intellectual and interpersonal gaps is placed on them. This pushes them to the margins of social and academic encounters in the classrooms and adds on the major responsibility of educating their White classmates and facilitating dialogue where their professor has not been able to do so. These roles are often high stakes. The call for personal stories comes directly from the professor or is silently endorsed by him or her when they do not contest students' demands. Students of color are forced to decide whether or not to oblige their professor's request, acquiesce to a dehumanizing pedagogy, risk taking an oppositional stance, or relinquish their claims to the classroom altogether. These instances are not random or fleeting. In fact, they often signal to students the activation of a recurring pattern in which knowledge related to people of color is not valued and the presence of students of color is appropriated. Students of color are in a 'damned if you do, damned if you don't' situation because talking back and silence, taking an oppositional stance and complicity all hold negative consequences for them personally and academically.

CHAPTER 5

STRATEGIES FOR CREATING SAFETY IN RACIALLY HOSTILE COLLEGE CLASSROOMS

For the most part, the concept of 'the classroom as a safe space' is used as if everyone automatically knows the meaning. It seems like the more people use it the less we ask the questions: how *do* we make classrooms safe? For whom? And perhaps most importantly, what kinds of dangers are there in classrooms? Some scholars have begun to interrogate this mantra that calls for students to feel a sense of belonging in educational environments, inclusion in classroom activities and the freedom to engage in the process of learning (Holley and Steiner 2005; Kaufman 2008). Those scholars who value the culture and life skills that students learn at home and in their respective communities define 'safety' more specifically as a space in which students feel comfortable openly discussing their out of school lives in a school environment (Toynton 2006; Hall 2008). Still others conceptualize 'safe space' as a process in which students are in a dialogical relationship with each other, the instructor, the physical space and risk (Hunter 2008). In this case the degree of safety is dependent upon the extent to which students participate in "the risk of expressing emotion to 'the other'" and the risk of grappling with conflicts (9). In this chapter I discuss how the goals of belonging, dialogue, conflict resolution, self-

expression and transformation are also the desired aims of participants in my study, but they were attainable only after they took measures to protect themselves from racial subjugation. I propose an alternative view of safety in the classroom by examining participants' testimonies about what they consider to be the dangers found in White-dominated classrooms and reflecting on the strategies they used to keep themselves and sometimes others safe from racial harm.

Not all educators and scholars hold an idealistic view of the classroom as a safe space. Boostrom (1998) declared the call for safety in the classroom an unreasonable and immature request on the grounds that education is a process of intellectual, social and personal growth that is inherently uncomfortable, even disconcerting. Henry (1993) and Baszile (2004) consider 'safety' to be a derivative of liberal feminist discourse that promotes conflict avoidance over the critical engagement of issues such as race/ethnicity, religion, political affiliation and sexuality. These scholars understand the classroom to be a contested space or a site of cultural struggle in which students from privileged and marginalized groups grapple with historic relations of power while trying to learn course material. However, the testimonies of participants in my study indicated that safety was not a matter of reducing the stress of learning new material or avoiding conflict for the sake of building community and unity. Students not only wanted to interrogate power relations but also sought to protect themselves from racial subjugation in the classroom. For the students of color in my study, safety amounted to warding off racially dehumanizing ideologies, interactions, and roles projected onto them in the classroom. They adopted various strategies for throwing off the yoke of racial

positioning in order to focus on building a self-defined standpoint from which to assert their identity as a "good student" and for remaining steadfast in the achievement of their educational goals.

In this chapter I describe the strategies that students of color used to create safety for themselves, and sometimes for others, in college classrooms. The four main strategies they used were 1) picking your battles 2) putting on a good show 3) strategic self-disclosure and 4) facilitating racial conflict. These were often their best attempts to avoid being positioned as the cultural spokesperson or stigmatized as the angry minority by classmates and the professor. I will also elaborate on the specific kind of protection that these strategies provided for students of color, and how they were a part of the negotiation for safety and self-defined standpoints in the classroom. Ultimately, students of color looked for a humanizing experience of themselves and people of color in college classrooms. When they realized that racial subjugation was the order of the day, they worked to create a safe space around themselves and within their consciousness that supported their intellectual and cultural integrity.

Picking Your Battles

> I think the hardest is when we casually talk about race in one of our non-race classes or non-diversity classes. Like in Interpersonal Communication we just talked a little bit about race, and they were just like, "oh yeah, how do you communicate with people of different races?" And someone brought up, "well, I'm taking a diversity class and it's just bullshit, it's all bullshit." And then another person's like, "Oh, my diversity class is so hard. I'm really struggling in that." And then another person was just like, "Oh well, just throw away race all together. Race is not important. That's not important at all". And that conflicts with me. That conflicts with my identity. But I can't say anything because everybody else praises that person for saying this great

> thing to get rid of race. And I was like, ooh, I'm not going to challenge that. But it's like every single day there's always an instance in class. And I'm just like, oh, wow, I've got to be silent here. It's almost like you have to pick your battles.
>
> --Rashid

In White-dominated classrooms, students of color who differ in perspective from or otherwise disagree with the White mainstream views and values regarding race that dominate classroom dialogue and interaction must decide whether or not to voice their perspectives. Stepping outside of the dominant discourse in classrooms was often viewed as standing in opposition to the professor and fellow classmates whether or not the student's espoused view took a critical race stance. In light of this, participants talked about the importance of "picking your battles" when determining how to respond to the racial positioning imposed on them. When participants picked their battles they assessed the racial dynamics in the classroom, determined the standpoints in class that were considered acceptable/admissible, and determined the costs and benefits of taking an oppositional stance. Jarihd's quote at the beginning of this section demonstrates the kinds of comments that classmates made (and the professor's apparent lack of comments) about race-related topics that signaled to him that a critical stance on race would not be appreciated and might make him vulnerable to racial hostility even in a classroom where the issue of 'diversity' was raised. Jarihd determined that his classmates were defensive and outraged about the mere idea of learning about diversity, and would likely become vociferous if he tried to engage them in a critical examination of race-related issues. For Jarihd their defensiveness was problematic not just because it indicated that race was not an admissible topic, but because of the way they reduced the importance of

race to "bullshit." Their disdain for race-talk seemed to include a disregard for the fact that race was an integral aspect of Jarihd's identity as an Asian American male. Jarihd responded to their harsh words by pointing out that his classmates' views about race "conflicts with me. That conflicts with my identity."

Aware of the costs in speaking out against racism in the classroom, participants talked about making careful, conscious assessments of classmates' receptivity to dialoguing about issues of race. Even in Ethnic Studies classes, Zion said it imperative to know, "who you're dealing with, and how they're coming at you, and like why they're coming at you." Although in the Ethnic Studies department she found the racial dynamics to be less hostile and more in the spirit of wanting to learn about diversity issues, Zion still deemed it necessary to have a strategy for discerning the professor and classmates' degree of racial sensitivity. She discussed her approach:

> So I think you have to know where in the class of Ethnic Studies, where they're coming from. Where they're coming from and how they feel in that situation, and how deeply like they understand the struggle. And I say 'the struggle' as a broad sense of oppression and discrimination, marginalization, and all that stuff.

Zion's comment above indicated that she had assessed at least three key elements of the classroom environment – the professor's and classmates' ideological orientation towards race and oppression, their political stance or opinion, and the degree of understanding they had for the experiences of oppression faced by historically marginalized groups. Zion looked for the class to go beyond colorblindness and cultural difference in order to address racial oppression with both an intellectual understanding and a sense of urgency. The willingness and preparedness of

professors and classmates to do this contributed to Zion's determination about the level of safety in the classroom.

In classes where the topic was explicitly about diversity-based issues most participants enrolled with the expectation that race, ethnicity and related topics would be presented throughout the course readings as the subject of class discussion. However, participants indicated that their concerns moved beyond whether or not race-related issues would be discussed and more towards what would be the specific kind of language and treatment of the issues. This became a charged issue for Zion in her rhetoric class. The class was discussing the novel, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* in which the author used the term 'nigger.' Zion reflected back to the classroom experience of dialoguing about this text:

Zion: So when we talk about race and stuff, I understand that in a lot of dialogue [in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*] the word 'nigger' is used a lot and stuff like that. but it makes me really uncomfortable when we say it in class. Granted, it is rhetoric, and it is scholarly rhetoric, but using those types of words, and I'm the only person that identifies [as African-American] that tends to be very, very uncomfortable. And I don't know how to handle the situation a lot of times.

Deanna: So, how <u>do</u> you handle it in the moment?

Zion: It depends on the moment, and how I feel that day. Most times if I don't say anything, I might send a teacher an email later. But I at times don't say anything because I know how I feel at the moment as being one person identifying as the one person they're talking about. I'm the only person they're talking about because no one else is Black! … I feel if I say anything it's going to point me out more and disconnect me more from the majority. Not that I want to be in the majority….So I don't say anything. One, to save myself from having to feel more victimized and from having all my tensions and stress levels go up in huge amounts. And just because sometimes you choose your battles.

Zion pointed out that the term 'nigger' was not a neutral term to her as an African-American woman. The historical record of the term has had a violent effect on African American people with whom Zion identified (Kennedy 2002; Delgado and Stefancic 2004). While Zion was aware that the context in which they discussed the N-word was an academic one, it did not erase the history of the usage of the term and its impact on her. Therefore, having a room full of White classmates and a White professor using the N-word liberally became very disturbing to Zion. In the moment she had to decide if she wanted to speak about the dynamics that were created for her in the class as a result of the rhetorical usage of the N-word. Zion recognized that speaking on this could have estranged her from the rest of the class. This would have added to her sense of alienation as the only African American woman in the class. She chose to remain silent about the issue not simply to avoid conflict or stress, but to prevent entering into a power struggle over the validity of her experience in a classroom situation in which she was clearly outnumbered and out-powered.

Zion also spoke to her view that the particulars of the institutional context, i.e., a White-dominated classroom at a historically White university exacerbated the racial tension she felt when the N-word was spoken again and again in class. She felt certain that the N-word would be discussed differently and she would have experienced the discussion differently had the incident taken place at a historically Black institution. She stated:

> I don't know how I feel about people reading literature, regardless of what it says, when you say nigger in it and it's only affecting one person- like if we were at Howard University, and we were reading that, it'd be completely different. You know what I mean? But when only I'm affected by that, you

> might hear it like it's a bad word. You know, like 'shit', that's a bad word. But the word nigger has so many implications that only affect me.

Zion felt singled-out by the use of the N-word in a White-dominated classroom. She speculated that in a predominantly Black setting there would have been a buffer in being surrounded by mostly African American students whether they shared her views or not. One of Zion's strategies for protecting herself from being singled out in classes was to enroll in classes with her sister or a close friend so that she had an outlet in case troubling racial incidents occurred again. She explained:

Zion: My last class I was talking about I had with Denise, and then me and my sister take classes together… But that was strategic, so, like we planned that.

Deanna: And why do you do that?

Zion: Well, we do it …because we understand we're walking into non-safe spaces, and so if you have somebody to go with you, to understand how you feel. Like me and Denise sit there and write notes to each other when someone says something. We're like, she's so stupid, or I can't believe, like you know what I mean? So you know someone else mentally is on the same page as you.

So you do it so you can feel safe in the great safe spaces, you actually can feel a sense of safety, and that someone understands what you're going through and how you feel. So it makes life a lot easier.

Deanna: So it actually works, that strategy?

Zion: It works so that when you leave class you don't have to explain the whole story to all your friends. … It's like someone will be there to understand how you felt at that precise moment. So it works. I think it's good. I think Dr. Smith talks about it in his Battle Fatigue Theory about doing stuff like that, actually. And at first we didn't, like at first we just did it because we're like, let's be together. But like after we got in the class, because we don't anticipate, okay, we <u>do</u> anticipate, we hope it's not going to be a horrible class and we're not going to feel like crap everyday. But usually when it

> turns into that, we're like, thanks for being there so I could vent.

Zion pointed to the importance of having an ally in classes designated as "non-safe spaces." In this regard participants picked their battles before entering a class by coordinating and relying on the empathetic ear of a friend, classmate or in this case, sister as a preemptive measure. For Zion, picking your battles and, in effect, bringing your own safety net into the classroom was a way to protect herself from "having to feel more victimized and from having all my tensions and stress levels go up in huge amounts."

Oscar also talked about how tense racial dynamics and the strategies necessary to negotiate through them often induced stress and fatigue.

> I choose my battles because… you read about this racial battle fatigue, and it's really present at the University. I think to some people it comes to the point where [they ask themselves] "do I have the strength to go to class today?" Because I know even if they didn't want to make a comment that day for the discussion, somebody calls them out and is like, "Well, you said this last time, what do you think now about this?" And it's where anybody else, you only say your opinion if you want to, and if you raise your hand. And so I've had, not in my experiences, but I've had friends who will just be like, "I really can't go to this class today."

Oscar pointed out that another preemptive approach to picking battles was to not attend class. While sloughing class may appear to the onlooker as a lack of commitment to academic achievement and a poor work ethic, Oscar discussed it as one strategy that students of color used to cope with *racial battle fatigue*. Racial battle fatigue was developed as a theoretical framework to address the social psychological impact of racially unsupportive and oppressive environments on people of color (Smith, Allen, and Danley 2007). The term specifically refers to the physiological and psychological strain of trying to cope with everyday acts of

racism, both subtle and overt. The authors described the symptoms as very similar to those of military soldiers coping with the stress and posttraumatic stress of war:

> In the aftermath of a racially traumatic event, it is normal to have feelings of detachment or emotional numbness or a feeling of distorted or altered reality (e.g.,, wondering, "Did I hear what I thought I just heard?"). Surprise, shock, and frustration are oftentimes followed by the attempt to force the event from memory, denying that it occurred, or reliving the event in dreams or in conversations with others. Unfortunately, for most people of color, these negative feelings or the associated collective memories seldom fade; instead, they become a part of a person's life history. (Smith et al. 2007, 555)

In the context of this study, Oscar and other participants used the term racial battle fatigue to make sense of the stress they felt as a result of confronting racial hostility on a regular basis at the University of Utah. The framework helped them understand certain behaviors as coping mechanisms in a distressing social environment rather than internalize negative feelings about themselves. For example, participants talked about times when they or other students of color would skip classes, sleep more than a usual amount, or space out in class as a way of releasing the strain they felt from attending racially hostile classes. Participants and other students of color who did not have a framework such as this one to organize their stress responses in a larger socio-political context often felt guilty and ashamed, labeled themselves as lazy, and questioned their own academic and social capabilities. As Oscar put it, "It's hard because I think what you really have to do here at the University is pick your battles, because if you don't, you're going to get so worn out." So participants were conscientious in their assessment of the racial dynamics in the classroom, determining which racial positions were acceptable, and figuring out ways to protect themselves both from the stigma of speaking out and the costs of silence.

Putting on a Good Show

Although students of color were admitted into the university they reported that they were frequently made to feel as if their seat was an unearned, undeserved privilege that was taken away from a more qualified White mainstream student through affirmative action policies. The strategy that participants used to dispel these accusations was to over-perform the role of "the good student" and otherwise "putting on a good show" in the classroom. This strategy was aimed at proving to White mainstream professors' and classmates that participants had indeed earned a place at the university and were capable of performing well both academically and socially. Rashid elaborated on the elements that comprised his performance as an exemplar student:

Rashid: A lot of times I feel like it's a competition, because I go into the classroom just, you know, not really knowing anyone, and knowing that I'm going to have to perform a certain way. And I always find myself working really hard in different classes, just to be taken seriously. Because a lot of times they [White professors and classmates] have these stereotypes that [African American students] don't work hard. And I feel like I'm always fighting to overcome those kind of stereotypes. I don't have an issue with communicating with Caucasian people in my classroom, but I just know that I'm going to have to perform a certain way, that my performance is going to have to be key in order to be taken seriously as an African American.

Deanna: Can you describe what 'that certain way' is?

Rashid: What I mean by that, by performing, you mean?

Deanna: Yeah.

Rashid: Like I know that I'm going to have to know my materials, that I'm going to have to come to class prepared, that I'm going to have to, you know, be able to converse about the conversation or the topic to feel like I'm an equal. Because a lot of times, If I just sit back and I don't talk in the class, I don't feel like I'm

> taking advantage of my full capability. So a lot of times I find myself studying, reading the material just to be able to perform in class, just to be taken seriously.
>
> Because I feel like I have to prove to myself, and these other people, that, you know what, I earned this seat here, I earned it, to be able to sit next to you and be able to learn, that this was not handed to me, that I'm working hard, just as hard as you are. And I'm proving this to myself. Because a lot of times, a lot of people believe that African Americans or people like me, that I was given this seat, and I didn't earn it, which is not true. I worked hard before I transferred here, and I had a B average when I transferred here, so I earned my seat, I earned to be able to learn.

Rashid was not simply trying to demonstrate how much he had studied or his level of intelligence as many students often feel compelled to make known in the classroom. He was trying to prove to the professor and classmates that he was admitted into the university through hard work and merit, rather than through unearned privilege or pity. Rashid entered class prepared to study hard and participate actively, but the performance element indicated his awareness that his presence at the university was questioned and his success (or lack thereof) was under surveillance. Studies have shown that many times students of color felt as though they were admitted into predominantly White universities and colleges as guests rather than accepted automatically as full members of the university community. Turner described 'guest status' as one in which the individual never feels at ease but obligated to abide by the host's house rules. She wrote:

> Guests are not family, whose foibles and mistakes are tolerated. On the contrary, guests must follow the family's wishes without question, keep out of certain rooms in the house, and always be on their best behavior. (Turner 1994, 356)

Participants worked to perform the role of good student because as students of color they were frequently treated as though their ideas and experiences were foreign to the White mainstream culture of knowledge and interaction. At times, their status reflected that of an unwelcomed guest especially when their presence at the university was reduced to an obstruction of meritocratic procedures and academic excellence. Performing the role of good student was one way that students of color attempted to simultaneously earn their way to legitimate membership and prove that they had already earned it through their academic achievements and ability to fit easily into an academic environment governed by White mainstream values.

Other times participants were concerned about their racial performances in classrooms. Eva's idea of "putting on a good show" was influenced by her experience of having professors and classmates stare at her in class. Although Eva had not inquired about the stares directly, she sensed that professors and classmates were weighing her against the extent to which she fit their racial stereotypes. Eva explained how she came to this conclusion:

> This is the difference, I think. Being a White person, the only reason why you'd ever get stared at is because someone was trying to look at you because you look good or you don't, or because they want to talk bad about you. I think being a minority, they're looking at you because of those two things, plus they're looking at you because they expect you to act a certain way and because of your race, or what looks to be your race, you know, stereotypically. They look at you to see, well if she acts that way, then all Black girls act that way,
>
> and I think being stared at brings you down because you feel like you're always having to put a show on, and that's the way I feel when I'm getting stared at. I feel like I always have to put a show on, I always have to, because if I put on a wrong show, it's not going to just be me that's going to be criticized, it's going to be my whole race is going to be criticized.

> But if I put on a good show, you know, they're going to think positive about everyone of my race. And that's the way I feel; when you make a mistake, it's not a mistake only on you, but it's a mistake on your race. And that's the difference from being looked upon as being a White person and looked upon as a minority. Because when you're a White person you're looked upon as an individual; when you're a minority you're looked upon as a group. …And so, I think it's like I have to put on a show.

Whatever the reasons were for staring at Eva, she felt the pressure of being the only African American student in class and being positioned as the representative of her race (i.e., the cultural spokesperson). Eva pointed out that if a White mainstream student did not live up to social expectations then they were judged as individuals, while her actions held implications for all African Americans. Therefore, Eva found it necessary to put on a good show in the classroom to protect herself from racial positioning and also so as not to bring a negative reputation to African Americans. I asked Eva to explain to me in more detail what it looked like when she put on a good show. This was how she described it:

> A good show, to me, would have to be nothing bothers me. Everything's okay. And that if anything's said, you know, you just kind of brush it off. You don't get angry and stuff like that. And you just let things go, you know? But a bad show, to me, would be like, you get angry about something. You start obsessing over things, you start complaining, you start yelling at people, you know, that's considered a bad show because nobody understands. And you're trying to express yourself and you're not doing it in a bad way, but you're expressing yourself. And it's like, if we try to express ourselves, it's 'scary' [to White professors and classmates]. But if a White person expresses themselves it's not scary, it's just, they're just trying to get their point across.

Eva learned which kinds of behavior she could exhibit in order to elicit acceptance or stigmatization from classmates and the professor. Although many professors appreciated and encouraged dialogue in the classroom, Eva found that when she expressed her frustration or anger towards a perspective presented in class she was

labeled as "scary." She faced this dilemma on a regular basis because the course curriculum, classmates and even the professor had the tendency to present negative and dehumanizing images of people of color. In these cases, Eva would have to act as though these images were not demeaning, misinformed or hurtful in order to garner acceptance from the class and maintain her image as a good student. Furthermore, Eva noted that because she was positioned as the cultural spokesperson, the judgment elicited by her performance was extended to all African Americans. By expressing her views, Eva risked being perceived as the problem or ironically, as the element that made the classroom undemocratic and unsafe for White mainstream students.

Rashid talked in greater detail about his thought process in deciding to put on a good or bad show when faced with racially offensive remarks by his classmates. His strategy was to mask his true opinion of the speaker and address the content of the remarks instead. For Rashid, insulting a student would hold the added weight of being positioned as the 'angry minority' and a troublemaker. He explained:

> And also, a lot of times when I go into class, I really listen to what an argument would be of a student in class, and I really think about it. And again, I try to think to myself, "How can I respond to this question without letting this individual know that I believe that he's an asshole."
>
> So a lot of times I really think hard, because a lot of times being African American, if you disagree, you're seen as being, you know, disorderly. And I never want to be perceived as being a troublemaker. That's why a lot of times when I do state my opinion or state my feelings, I'm very respectful towards the feelings of the person who is giving the argument. So I always try to, you know, think of a way to be professional, and not allow myself to fall into those stereotypes they think that I fall into; you know, being rude, being angry, being, you know, just being all the negative things that a lot of African Americans are perceived.
>
> So that's how I don't let a person know that I'm upset, because as soon as you let a person know that you're upset, then your whole focus, everything

> that you're trying to do, you lose that. It evaporates, it leaves you, and then you're thrown off. So I never let a person know that I'm angry. I never raise my voice, and I'm very respectful.

Rashid spoke very clearly about his strategy. I asked him if his approach was producing his desired results. He responded affirmatively:

> It works a lot. And I think the reason why it works is because I'm letting them know that I'm on your same - me and you are on the same level, we're on the same page. I can take in what you're saying to me, and I hear exactly what you're saying to me. And I'm giving you my opinion, and I'm being respectful. And it's letting them know that, you know, I can talk in a professional manner. So, it works.

One of the key aspects of Rashid's strategy was to refrain from stating his opinion or expressing his emotions. This was a protective measure for students of color on two counts. First, because sanitizing the emotion out of their remarks was a way of hiding the fact that racially dehumanizing comments were offensive and hurtful. Masking emotions demonstrated to the professor and classmates that the participant would not succumb to the angry minority stereotype. Secondly, when Rashid constructed his remarks in a way that was devoid of emotion he participated in the academic *modus operati* of objectivity and unbiased knowledge. Thus, Rashid's performance worked to dispel White mainstream stereotypes about racism as the machination of an individual's faulty perception that polluted academic work.

Midwin tried to both control the emotional intensity in her tone of voice and respond openly to racially insensitive remarks. She explained why this was more complicated to do than it sounded:

> Like how we respond? ... you just go crazy sometimes because it's just like, what the heck are you [White classmates] saying, kind of thing. So I think the way we [students of color] respond, because, I mean, just the way you say something people will take it differently just by the tone of your voice kind of thing, so I have to work on that, definitely… Just mentioning to them that,

> okay, hold on a second, that was problematic what you just said, and kind of giving them a perspective of where we're coming from.

Midwin explained that although she felt outrage towards remarks made by classmates, she recognized that her response to them had to be tempered in order for them to hear her counterpoints. Midwin made this accommodation based on her determination that some White classmates do what to learn about race and social justice. She continued:

> There's obviously some problematic things. Like I think they want to learn, I think everyone wants to learn, because I think a lot of them are at a point to say, okay so we're White, what does that mean, kind of a thing. Like kind of a point in their education or whatever. So they'll say random stuff that doesn't make sense. But it doesn't stop us [students of color] from opening our mouths; we still participate, we were really active today in participation. So yeah, I think what we do need to control is how we say it, definitely, because it comes out like, "oh my gosh [tone expressing shock]."

While Midwin recognized that her White mainstream classmates were going through their own learning process, she honored her own as well. Midwin and other students of color in her class chose to be careful about expressing the true emotions behind their remarks, but they remained steadfast in pointing out the problems and offenses in their classmates remarks.

Strategic Self-Disclosure

> At least if I'm sharing an experience that hurt me or whatever, at least for me it's coming from a space of power, because it's my power to share that, and it's my power to speak it. As where if I don't speak, like, it feels like all power is taken away, and that face of pity, I just don't want it. … I'll also admit I don't often readily just volunteer this out to the class. I don't just put it out there for them. Usually it comes after I've been asked directly.
>
> --John

As noted in Chapter 4: *Racialized Roles and the Struggle for Self-Defined Standpoints*, students of color are often called upon by professors and classmates to share personal stories about their experiences of racism. This kind of racial positioning often carries with it an expectation that students of color speak not just for themselves as individuals but on behalf of their entire racial ethnic group. Additionally, when professors and classmates asked to hear personal testimonies about racism they seldom considered that the retelling of stories could be a painful experience in and of itself. At the same time, participants often wanted to express their views and use their life experiences as proof that racism continued to be an epidemic today. Participants made conscious and strategic decisions about when to self-disclose and when to refuse the requests and remain silent.

Sometimes, students of color used requests for self-disclosure as a pedagogical moment to teach the class a lesson about race. John described a class discussion in which he willingly offered his perspective on a text they were reading in class.

> I can think of a specific example; we were talking about someone, and experience that we had read, and I don't remember exactly what it was, but it was someone's experience of racism. And all of a sudden, people in the class started to dismiss that experience from the reading, "Well maybe it wasn't racist because these people, they were really trying to help, they weren't trying to hurt," and all these different things. So, and then, of course, then the question comes back to me as one of the few people of color, "Do you think it's racist?" So I shared instead of answering directly yes or no, whether or not I felt this was racist, I actually shared an experience [of racial discrimination] that I had going to Chili's restaurant here in Salt Lake.

His classmates presented him with a yes or no question but John voluntarily shared one of his own personal encounters with racism to convey his perspective. He had a story he wanted to share with his classmates that addressed the questions they were

asking about race from a position that had not yet been voiced. John used this moment to inform his peers about his experiences and perspective. From John's perspective the content of the story was about disempowerment and marginalization, but being in control of when he spoke his story became a source of empowerment. John gained control over the content, meaning and consequently how others responded to him by telling it on his own accord.

John noticed that many times classroom encounters revealed that students and professors viewed him as an object of pity and sympathy. He described this phenomenon as disconcerting and recurring:

> I also have an issue with people approaching me after class. I don't know what it is. I guess I feel very singled out in those instances, like because I don't know what it is about it that makes them want to come and either console me or congratulate me or whatever, when they're not doing that regularly for all the other students in the class who share [personal] experiences, or thoughts. So, I mean, I have a whole issue with that happening also. So once again, there's like the two sides to this one. A lot of positive can come out of it, but at the same time, it's very draining to constantly be the one in the class that's constantly having to share some kind of experience to make other people understand.
>
> There's just some days that, you know, yeah, I want you to understand, but I don't want to be the one to have to make you understand. Like, maybe you should be learning this on your own, or maybe you should think through the readings critically enough that you can recognize without me having to say it to you. It's just like, it gets very tiresome. And so, I mean, although they can be very good experiences, I think after a while and as they build up time and time again, they become very negative experiences overall, no matter what good came out of them, because it's like, once again I'm the one expected to do this…. I can pretty much guarantee in any class it will happen at least once during the course, but it usually happens quite often.

John stated that he knew his personal stories were being used to benefit the education of White students. He recognized that his stories were a supplement to the reading curriculum and filled a gap in the professor's knowledge. As Kaufman writes:

> The personal experiences of students become the driving force behind the theoretical conclusions we draw about structures of inequality. Students learn from each other's experiences – experiences that neither I nor a text could provide with as much legitimacy, believability, and affectivity. (2008, 170)

Unfortunately, participants found that their personal stories were often disputed by classmates. Even if a student of color was willing to offer up their stories to teach their classmates about racism, they could not control the responses they will receive. Sometimes they were prepared to defend themselves, and other times not. In one incident, an instructor approached John after class to apologize for allowing him to be verbally attacked. John explained why he would not accept the professor's apology:

> There have been a few times, numerous times, really, that some aspect of my identity was called into question. … So I've just had some really horrible, horrible things said, and after class, other people will approach me. I've even had professors approach me and just be like, "I'm really sorry that that happened today," and my response to them is usually like, "if you're really sorry, why didn't you say something? When I was being attacked in that class, where were you? If you feel so much for me, you should have been there to help me, and not let me take it all."
>
> …because I'm tired of people apologizing for things that happened when they don't do anything. It's like, you're not really sorry, you know. If you really actually cared about what just happened, you would have been there as my ally helping me out, and you weren't. I don't, so when they apologize to me, I see it as very insincere. And so I've gotten to the place now where I'm comfortable enough with myself, you know, and my standing and social circles or whatever, that when people do that to me, I do call them on it, and I'm just like, you should have said something. Don't always leave it to me, you should have said something.

John questioned the professor's expressed concern and remorse on the grounds that it was not aligned with his actions in the classroom. John employed a strategy of speech by "calling out" classmates or professors if their sentiments were out of alignment with their actions in the classroom. This was a form of self-disclosure as

compared to participants who felt that any display of their emotions or hurt and angry feelings would stigmatize them socially and academically. By calling professors and classmates out John revealed his true feelings and held people accountable for their desire to act in a concerned and protective manner. Additionally, there was a big difference between interrogating someone's narrative and questioning/objecting to his or her identity. Classmates may have felt free to cross this line because John's identity as a man of color was visible to them and therefore made into public property open for debate and discussion. The recurrence of incidents like these clearly indicated that professors and students had few if any models on how to talk about racially sensitive issues in classrooms.

In this case, John felt empowered enough to hold the professor accountable for not intervening in a racially hostile classroom interaction. If a student is positioned as John was, as both an expert and a target, he has perhaps earned the privilege of speaking to the instructor as an equal or peer. After all they are essentially co-teaching. When John and other students of color disclose their personal stories to supplement the curriculum and enrich the class discussion they become colleagues, at least momentarily and depending on the situation. If the two were in a formalized relationship as co-facilitators in a group process they would have a serious problem if one of them left the other out on a limb and subjected to attack. This informal and yet oft assumed role of co-teacher, co-facilitator changes the rights and privileges of students of color in the classroom. As John's testimony indicated, it may be more empowering for students of color to choose for themselves

whether or not they want to disclose their personal stories than to have a professor call for them – on demand- to speak personally to the entire class.

The Cost of Silence and Declining Requests for Disclosure

There are a number of theories about the purpose and meaning of silence in the classroom. Many instructors have viewed silence as a lack of student participation or engagement, especially in classrooms that employed a dialogue-based pedagogy. More progressive accounts of silence reframe it as active listening that challenges dominant classroom culture in which speech-making is privileged (Li 2004). Based on the participants' testimonies, I present another perspective on silence as a strategy used by students of color to respond to the dilemma of being outnumbered and out-powered in classrooms in which speaking out would racially position them in ways that undermined their cultural and intellectual integrity (i.e., cultural spokesperson, angry minority). Furthermore, participants learned that silence was not a way to help them avoid conflict. In fact, it often required them to internalize the dilemma or appear to the professor and classmates as uncooperative or distraught. In this section I discuss these two distinct uses of silence.

First, students of color used silence as a refusal to disclose personal accounts of racism to classmates and the professor. In these instances students of color were presented with a request to talk the class about what it is like to be a person of color. Participants weighed whether or not they wanted to publicly discuss their experiences, and if not they remained silent. John gave an example of a classroom interaction in which he was asked to share personal stories about being Mexican

despite the fact that John identifies as mixed race Asian American and European American. John described the encounter:

> I've actually had some really interesting experiences as mixed race, because some people can't readily recognize what my racial heritage is, or my ethnic heritage. In one of my classes we were talking about immigration, which is, of course, a hot topic now. And this White guy who sat next to me, he turned to me and said, "John, how do you feel as a Mexican?" And I was like, "Well actually I don't feel as a Mexican because I'm not," and then he apologized like, "I didn't mean to accuse you of being Mexican." And I was like, well, you know, "I didn't take it as an accusation, you just misidentified my ethnicity. I'm actually Korean." So it's kind of interesting that way, to see that I am expected to speak for people of color, but people don't readily recognize my ethnicity, like maybe they don't know who I'm supposed to be speaking for.

John was conscientious about the tendency for people of color to be tokenized and upheld as the spokesperson of their race. It was an issue that he had spent time thinking about and figuring out strategies for responding to people's queries. He explained:

> …In what I've been doing, the work that I've been doing here on campus, you know, with student activism, …we've always been very quick to recognize that being asked to speak for an entire group, how that is oppressive and discriminatory in itself. And so whenever I make comments in class, or whenever I'm asked to, I always make sure to include that I'm only speaking for myself, and I'm speaking from this specific experience of who I am as a person.

John's speech strategy cleverly called attention to the fact that his ethnicity had been misidentified, but was careful not to dismiss people of Mexican descent in the process. In this case, a White student was soliciting John to give his perspective on immigration issues, presumably because of his lived experience with immigration or his cultural perspective as a member of a group disproportionately affected by recent immigration policies. It appeared that the White student was seeking an authentic or first-hand personal story about immigration from a Mexican student.

While speaking out about racial issues and making racial dynamics in class more transparent at times allowed students to elude feelings of guilt and complicity, it propelled them into the politics of speech in the classroom. Then they had to decide what stories to tell and how to tell them. Also they were forced to seriously consider how the telling of their story would impact their own well-being. John talked about his process of making the decision to disclose his personal stories:

> But there's some things, or some days even, that the same story that might have been just fine to share the day before, on that day, something has been happening and it's not a space that I want to go to.

If students made the assessment that it was not a good time or place for them to disclose their personal stories they then had to decide how to decline the request. John talked about how professors and students reacted when he declined to tell his personal story.

John: my response when I was asked by a professor to share [a personal story], the professor had singled me out, you know, like, "What was your experience with this," and I was just like, you know, I said, I kind of sat there for a second trying to think and trying to just collect my thoughts, and I just said, "Right now I can't discuss this, I don't want to discuss this right now."

Deanna: You told the professor you didn't want to discuss it?

John: Yeah, I was like, "no", I said, "I don't feel comfortable discussing it right now," and the reaction after class, the professor and students approached me, like, "I'm so sorry," like, oh are you okay. It's like, no, I'm not not sharing because I'm so hurt or because you've now all hurt me, but I'm not sharing because that's just where I'm at right now, today, in this space. And I don't need your pity, I don't want you to come up and pity me and be like, "Oh, poor you, you're experiences, whatever your experiences are in life that we happen to be discussing, it must be so horrible for you and I just can't…" I don't want that; I don't want them to pity me because of my poor existence. And so it's like, what's worse, cutting myself and bleeding for them and letting them know

> all of these experiences and things that have happened to me, or is it worse to know to have them come up and openly pity me like that.

I talked to John about his sense that his classmates and professors assumed that John's stories were painful and traumatic ones. They approached John after class to offer him sympathy for his assumed pain. However, they did not consider that the classroom dynamics may be perceived by John as an unsafe or inappropriate time and place to disclose his personal experiences. Also John was uncomfortable being in the passive position of receiving pity – misplaced or otherwise. Makini further elaborated on the painful costs of silence.

Makini reflected on occasions in her Community Health class when she chose to be silent on the problematic ways in which people of color and health problems were discussed. I asked Makini to help me understand the cost of silence to her:

> Deanna: How is silence costly to you?
>
> Makini: Well, I don't know, it's kind of hard to articulate, but generally the silence is the way that I usually tend to deal with things just because I try not to be a confrontational person. But I think that when I'm in those situations, I kind of feel like it's my responsibility or my duty to speak up for the people who they're talking about, because their voiceless and they don't have a voice in the classroom, but White people and the professor are discussing them in ways that paint such a wrong picture of the entire community. And so if I sit there and don't say anything, I feel like, sort of like a silent co-conspirator.

While silence may have helped Makini avoid confrontation with her peers and the professor, she was left to confront her own guilt and complicity over perpetuating racial stereotypes. It is notable that Makini was carrying the weight of representing

racial ethnic minorities. This delineated her into the Cultural Spokesperson role, whether by silence or speech.

Facilitating Racial Conflict

At times participants talked about their efforts to create safety in the classroom not just for themselves individually but for other classmates as well. This typically occurred when there was more than one student of color in the classroom, and that student was an ally. Additionally, the classroom setting was often one in which the overall course topic was race-related and the pedagogy was relatively open to posing queries and comments from alternative viewpoints. For example, Catalina was enrolled in an honors level course covering the topic of Immigration and Race. There were two main incidents that compelled her and her allies to try to cultivate safety in the classrooms. Catalina described her experiences in an Honors class designed around a special topic: immigration and race. The students in the class were predominantly White with three Latina/o students and an Asian American student. The course was co-taught by a Latina professor and a White male professor. The course spanned two semesters. In the first semester students researched and discussed the topic. In the second term, students were scheduled to take a field trip to Mexico. Catalina described the incidents that indicated to her and the two other Latina/o students that the classroom was a racially unsafe space:

Deanna: So I'm interested in what led up to that student's outburst, explosion you said.

Catalina: Right, yeah. It was the first day we walked in, and we were expecting a White dominated class, but I don't think we were expecting the dynamic like that.

> We got in, they had arranged the seats, the instructors had, and one instructor was White, older, like in his 60s, and the other was Latina. And so they arranged it so it was Latina, White, Latina, White, Latino, White, Asian, White, and it was just like that, it really was. So we couldn't even sit together. And then we started talking about the readings, and just the way the class was constructed, and I don't know, it was just a very difficult environment.
>
> The three of us, well two of us are Peruvian and one is Mexican American and when the instructor found out, the White one, I mean, he thinks he's understanding and in a way he is, I guess. But he's all, "Oh my gosh, next thing we know Peruvians are going to overrun us." And I mean, he thought it was funny, but we didn't, because what does that imply? That Mexicans overrun us? That there's something negative about having a large Peruvian population? It was just sort of upsetting. And, I don't know. At first it was really dominated by White people, and it was hard to interact with them. Like the next class time, even though they wanted us to sit like that, we sort of rebelled and sat just with us together. We had arrived early to make sure we could do that. And I later found out that we had intimidated the White people when we started doing that. I guess they'd gotten together and talked it over.

Catalina talked about how several factors indicated to her that the classroom was unsafe for students of color. The first sign was that the seating arrangement did not allow students to self- select where they would sit and next to whom. This can be particularly difficult for students of color because one of their strategies for navigating White-dominated classrooms in was to coordinate with friends and family which classes they were taking so that they could enroll together as Zion explained in the previous section (i.e., *picking your battles*). The assigned seating arrangement that dispersed students of color among White students disrupted their strategy to sit next to one another in class for support (Tatum 1997).

For Catalina the joke made by the White professor was also a warning signal. Even if we assume that the professor's intent was to be funny and connect with the three Latina/o students, the effect was actually off-putting. Ironically, the context for

the professor's statement was a course on immigration and race. His remarks resembled the anti-immigration sentiments of groups such as the Minute Men who actually do believe that Mexican immigrants are taking over the U.S. (Gilchrist 2008). The professor's remarks previewed for Catalina the kinds of comments that would be admissible by students and professors in discussing the very controversial and sensitive issues related to immigration and race.

The third incident that urged Catalina and her cohort to work on turning the classroom into a safe space involved a guest speaker. Vicky Wiseberg, a White female university staff member, came to the class to talk about the importance of understanding White privilege as an integral component to racism. Vicky's comments were met with a lot of resistance from the majority of the class.

> Oh, and then we had, I felt so bad for her. Vicky Wiseberg came in and talked about White privilege, and pretty much the whole class attacked her. I felt so bad for her, I really did. And the White professor was just sitting there, and looking down at his desk, he wasn't engaged at all. And then after she left, he twisted her words to say, basically just said he was trying to get focused on our project, and I was just so mad at him. So we started talking to the Director, and we were just like, you know, this stuff isn't appropriate, and it's not a very safe environment.

This confirmed for Catalina and her cohort that the majority of the class had a prescribed way of talking about race that marginalized the ways that Catalina, her cohort and Vicky were thinking and talking about race. Furthermore, it became clear that marginalized views of race would be subject to disrespect and sanctioned attacks. Recognizing that individual strategies may not be enough to protect her and her cohort from attack, Catalina notified the Director of the program that the classroom environment was not safe.

By carefully observing how classroom interactions unfolded along racial lines, Catalina realized that the classroom was unsafe both intellectually and socially for students of color. One of her friends and allies, a Latina student, gradually began to disengage from the hostile proceedings of class. Rather than participate in class discussion, she would work on her laptop computer. She became so tuned out from class that she could not keep track of class assignments and eventually dropped out. Catalina explained her friend's behavior:

> I got along with them well enough that I could share some of these things, and I didn't even share all of them. But I think for the other Latina, she didn't feel comfortable doing that yet, and so during this last semester she totally just checked out. She would come, but she would be on her computer or checking MySpace and stuff, and then we left I'm like, "Do you think we should get together and work on this?" And she goes, "What, we had an assignment?" You know, like she was really just out of it."
>
> And I felt really bad for her because we took this class because we wanted to make some sort of impact. And yet because she didn't feel safe, that really lessened her impact.

Catalina's friend was so focused on escaping the hostile racial dynamics in class that she totally disengaged from the class, even though the topic was one that she cared about. Catalina declared the class exhausting both emotionally and psychologically. Eventually, one of Catalina's Latino friends confronted the class about the racially hostile dynamics. She explained how it happened:

> The first semester was really tiring and frustrating, but there was this one point, because we had sort of tension on the issues, and never talked about how race and immigration intersected. And so for me and three friends that I took it with, it was really tiring. And actually one of the students [Latino student] just came out and had an explosion. And even though I felt glad for the student, and in a way I felt bad for the other class members, because he really attacked them, and I didn't think that was the most productive way to do it …That prompted a discussion that lasted two hours about race, immigration, how we can create a safe place in the classroom.

Although Catalina and her cohort took their concerns to the director of the program, no action was taken to remedy the situation. In the end, Catalina and her cohort took on the responsibility themselves for changing the racial dynamics in the classroom. She described how they initiated the discussion about the lack of safety in the classroom:

> Well, in the third week of class, one of the students [of color] who was a senior, and he's majoring in social justice education, brought up this idea, "you know I see some of the male, White males cutting off people, and I see you disregarding her," and da-da-da-da. He didn't say it like that, but he said, you know, "Let's maintain a safe space." And the class was like, "Why? What for?" and we're all like, "Yeah, you know what, if I want to say something personal or if I'm going to contribute and add my view to this immigration debate, I guess, I want to make sure that I can tell you without any repercussions."

The class initially rejected the sentiments disclosed by Catalina and her cohorts. She described what happened next:

> And the class basically felt attacked and they said, you know, "We're adults, we can learn to raise our hands." But after this blowout with the other student, some of the students are all, "We do need a safe space, because as a White student, I don't feel comfortable talking about race." And I was so glad they admitted it. Then we had an Asian girl in our class and she said, "I feel this is a White Latino binary." She didn't say it like that, but she said, "I just don't feel comfortable talking." And I was really sad, because we hadn't meant to dominate it either, you know?

One of the most interesting aspects of the events described by Catalina is that students of color are identified by White students as the source of racial tensions. The more that Catalina and her cohort spoke openly about racial dynamics in the classroom, the more they were viewed as making the classroom unsafe. Perhaps it was because they were no longer able to speak about racial issues without repercussions from Catalina and her cohort. Also notable was that the Asian American student felt marginalized from the tensions between White and Latino

students. She apparently felt that her concerns were distinct from both groups and unrepresented in the debates.

Arianna talked about a classroom experience in which she was identified by a White student as the source of danger in the classroom:

> Arianna: some students are really ignorant, especially in diversity credit classes, because they're just there for the credit. And they'll be reading Tim Wise or Peggy McIntosh, and I got in an argument with this White kid because he's like, "Duh, this person, this woman of color does not know what she's talking about," he was talking about Peggy McIntosh. And I was like, "Well, if you read the article, you'd realize that she's White."
>
> Then he ends up hating me and telling on me to my professor about how I'm unsafe. It's mostly White males that feel most threatened by me, which I think is really funny.
>
> But I'm just like, "How are you going to be mad at me when you're that ignorant, and not even read that," all she talks about is the privilege that she gets from being White, …And I was like, she lists, literally lists a whole list about how she gets all this privilege from being White. So I don't know if you read it or you just didn't get it, and I was just like, whoa.
>
> Deanna: So what was he doing, calling himself telling on you, telling on you for what? What did he say?
>
> Arianna: He's just like, "She's angry, she's just, I don't feel safe around her." And I'm like, "You are fulfilling a diversity credit, and you don't feel safe in the class? Well, I don't feel safe in this institution.

Arianna demanded that her classmate recognize that what he was feeling in the moment of having his remarks rebutted was a consistent, integral part of Arianna's everyday experiences attending a White-dominated university.

The Classroom as a Safe Space: A Black Feminist Revision

The participants in my study defined a safe space as a classroom free of the racism they found in the curriculum and in their interactions with the professor and

classmates. Although students worked actively to protect themselves, some also sought to create safe spaces for other students of color and for younger generations. Their individual strategies were geared towards assessing the racial dangers in the classroom and determining the cost of combating them; rejecting racially biased academic and social expectations; and deciding when to disclose personal stories and how to use them to facilitate critical lessons about race. As a collective strategy, participants worked with their allies to facilitate and resolve racial conflict in order to make the classroom an inclusive environment for all students.

Participants' strategies and aims were aligned with Patricia Hill Collins' articulation of the Black feminist project that defines safe spaces as "prime locations for resisting objectification as the Other" (2000, 111). The proponents of Black Feminism talk about safe spaces in a literal context as a physical location that was free from surveillance by more powerful groups. These spaces were often the homes of Black women who lived in neighborhoods in marginalized and disenfranchised parts of town. One way that Black women used this alienation from power strategically was by capitalizing on their homes as a space free from the controlling presence of White dominant society. In these spaces Black women provided a kind of nurturance that was restorative and a site for Blacks to interact with one another in their full humanity. bell hooks stated:

> Despite the brutal reality of racial apartheid, of domination, one's homeplace was the one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist. Black women resisted by making homes where all Black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves dignity denied us on the outside in the public world. (1990, 42)

These spaces also nurtured Black people as intellectuals by valuing their experience and the knowledge they constructed from it. Patricia Hill Collins elaborates:

> These sites offered safe spaces that nurtured the everyday and specialized thought of African-American women. In them Black women intellectuals could construct ideas and experiences that infused daily life with new meaning. These new meanings offered African American women potentially powerful tools to resist the controlling images of Black womanhood. (2000, 122-123)

Likewise, the participants in my study did not have a literal site within the classroom that they considered safe and to which they could go to for refuge. Their definition was more figurative representing their ability to deflect racial danger away from themselves as a participant in classroom interaction and their image as a student, an intellectual and a member of the university community. For example, participants disclosed personal stories in order to use them as an opportunity to bring the class into an awareness of racial issues. This did not necessarily make the entire classroom a safe space, but it did serve to carve out a niche in class discussion and perhaps in the consciousness of classmates and the professor where race could be talked about and examined.

Zion voiced a skepticism shared by many participants that a predominantly White classroom was an unlikely place of safety for students of color who took critical stances on racial issues. She shared with me her frustration with professors' declarations that the classroom is a safe space:

> I hate that, because what is a safe space? I have no idea what that means. … I hate teachers that feel like, "let's make these rules." Right. And they're like, "this is a safe environment, we're not going to do these things and these things". But really all that is rhetoric. All they're saying is this is what we aim to do, but what really happens is not a safe space. Right? Because how safe can it get when it's one Black person and 77 White people, how safe is

> that space? In words or just in bodies. That's not a safe space to me. So I think the word is so problematic.

Zion took the position that when students of color were in White-dominated classrooms they often had limited ways to influence the cultural, political and social dynamics in the classroom. As Perry stated, "spaces with predominantly White demographics increase this threat, as such spaces exclude people of color by definition if not by design" (2008, 227). While not all students stated their cynicism as pointedly as Zion, they expressed the same sentiment in other ways. For example, Angela declared that she would only discuss race and racism in class under certain circumstances:

> Angela: I learned from that English class that I won't ever talk about race again if it's with a White professor in a class full of White kids. But in Dr. Crenshaw's [an African American woman professor] class, I felt protected. Dr. Crenshaw would have told people to stop, so because it was a Black professor, I felt safe in talking about what I was talking about, with White privilege and stuff like that. So depending on the professor, that creates a safe space, at least for me.
>
> Deanna: So tell me more about what goes into making a classroom space safe for you.
>
> Angela: That I don't feel like I'm being judged because of my race, that I can make a comment without people acting up or.

Angela's definition of safe space posed a challenge to those scholars who reduced the concerns of students and educators to a desire to bypass the intellectual discomforts of learning. What many participants asked for was a space free of hostility and attack so that they *can* be engaged in the challenging process of learning. When this was not possible in the classroom they often sought alternative educational opportunities outside of the mainstream classroom. Oscar opted to build

his own program of study through the Office of Undergraduate Studies. He explained:

> like Spring semester, I really felt the racial battle fatigue coming on because… like you kind of get really tired and really depressed after talking about it [racism] over and over again. And I just felt myself really being exhausted physically and losing sleep at night. And so that's when I was just like, you know, this is important, but my health and my well being are also important, … But this year, especially now that I've created my own major, and going into the sort of classes that I'm into, they are safer spaces, right, because I particularly chose my classes. I think probably that was something in the back of my mind where I could shield myself…. I'm not saying all the classes that I chose are necessarily going to be a safe space, right, but I think, you know, with the ethnic studies and the gender studies I'm confident enough that it will have a professor that is a little more capable of dealing with these sorts of situations where you start to discuss the dynamics of races, class, gender, sexuality.

This route, although it required Oscar to invest even more time and effort in his academic studies, paid off for him by giving him more control over the courses he takes. Oscar declared an interdisciplinary major in Social Justice Education, Ethnic Studies and Gender Studies. While he was looking forward to being in classes where students would be expected to discuss their different views on race, he was not naive in thinking that these classes would be absolutely safe. The hope he carried into these classes mirrors that of other participants who called for professors to be better equipped to handle discussion about race.

Safe spaces for participants were not necessarily physical locations in the way that hooks described her grandmother's house (hooks 1990). They did however serve a similar purpose by giving students of color a space amidst the racially subjugating social and academic dynamics of classrooms to cultivate a self-defined standpoint. Collins wrote:

> When Black women define ourselves, we clearly reject the assumption that those in positions granting them the authority to interpret our reality are entitled to do so. Regardless of the actual content of Black women's self-definitions, the act of insisting on Black female self-definition validates Black women's power as human subjects. (2000, 225)

Participants used the previously described strategies to carve out a space within classroom interactions and dominant ideologies in which they could define themselves on their own terms as students and shape their identity as members of racial ethnic minority groups and human beings.

CHAPTER 6

STUDENTS OF COLOR REDEFINE 'EMPOWERMENT' IN WHITE-DOMINATED COLLEGE CLASSROOMS

Action must be developed from within the ranks of oppressed Americans. Schooling, which usually serves to reinforce and legitimate the status quo, can also enlighten and emancipate, working with rather than against indigenous efforts for liberation.

-- Christine E. Sleeter

Radical educational theorists embody two seemingly opposing viewpoints about schooling: 1) that it has been and continues to be one of the primary sites for the reproduction of inequality and 2) one of the last frontiers of hope for spurring on social justice and social transformation. Radical educational theorists contend that mainstream models of education and pedagogy have long served the interests of the privileged classes by socializing students to take their respective places in the hierarchical world of work and as subjects of democracy rather than as agents of social change. For example, traditional models of education are criticized for treating students as empty vessels to be filled with mainstream cultural knowledge and thereby disregarding the value of the knowledge that students have already

acquired from their home communities and from their life experiences. Radical educational theorists are known for their deep cynicism towards authoritarian teaching styles, and also for proposing interventions that seek to redirect the educational process to better serve the interests of students and underprivileged groups.

Within the overarching goal to build a more democratic society, one of the primary aims of many radical educational theorists is to empower students to become actively engaged in their own education and become agents of social change in the world. However, as the opening quote suggests even progressive philosophies and student-centered pedagogical strategies must beware of defining empowerment in ways that work *against* rather than *with* "indigenous efforts for liberation." In White-dominated classrooms, students of color are certainly "within the ranks of the oppressed" and therefore radical educators' notions of empowerment must be aligned with students' efforts to navigate racially hostile classrooms.

Part of reconciling these differing views of empowerment requires recognizing that scholar-practitioners often rely on notions that are informed by various schools of philosophy, their own political aims (e.g., progressive movement, feminism, and multiculturalism) and their distinct perspective in the privileged role of professor in the classroom. It has also been noted that the professor's authority is not automatically accepted by students, particularly in predominantly White universities when the professor is a woman of color (Srivastava 1997; Hunter and Nettles 1999; Torres 2003). Nonetheless, the professor –not the students-- is granted the institutional authority to determine the rules of classroom interaction and the

criteria for academic excellence. Educators' perspectives on what is oppressive about college classrooms and what counts as empowerment frequently do bear important insights that are very beneficial for students. To their credit, radical educators are inclined to pay attention to the lives of students in their communities, in society and in the classroom, and are known for encouraging students to develop ways to utilize and express their knowledge. Yet as feminist teacher Berenice Malka Fisher stated, "No matter how hard I listen to what students say, they would describe their experiences of the classroom differently" (2001, 13). Making such prescriptions without the input of students not only undermines the principles and practices of engaging students as knowledge-holders/producers, but it risks being irrelevant, incorrect and even oppressive. Furthermore, their assumptions are often applied to all students with very little consideration of how students of color experience White-dominated classrooms differently than do their White counterparts, and what kind of empowerment they might need as a result.

In this chapter, I will discuss how radical approaches to education such as critical multiculturalism, critical pedagogy and feminist pedagogy offer notions of empowerment that apply to students and members of marginalized groups generally, but demonstrate a lack of insight about the racialized predicament of students of color in White-dominated classrooms. Scholar practitioners in these fields have deliberately and strategically formulated curricula, pedagogy and the purposes of education in ways that guide students through academic, intellectual and dialogic training that will give them the necessary tools for breaking with mainstream cultural and intellectual traditions. These skills are meant to empower students in both the

classroom and in the world. At times critical of even their own attempts to empower students, radical educators have for many years engaged in sustained inquiry and dialogue with scholars and practitioners to maintain the integrity of their philosophies and projects (Sanchez-Casal and McDonald 2002; Darder, Baltodano, and Torres 2003). However, they have not adequately allowed their work to be informed by students of color, and as a result have effectively established them [students of color] as the silent benefactors or passive victims of their pedagogical experiments. Thus it is no surprise that participants in my study indicated that in the context of White-dominated classrooms empowerment was a phenomenon that they rarely if ever experienced. Key experiences that radical educators identify as aspects of an empowering education were in fact disconcerting to students in unexpected ways. For example, a few research participants stated that learning about the historical struggles of oppression and liberation by members of subordinated groups as endorsed by most radical educators left them in a state of overwhelm and paralysis.

In the beginning of this chapter I will examine the definitions of empowerment as espoused in critical multiculturalism, critical pedagogy and feminist pedagogy. Critical multiculturalism promotes a notion of empowerment that is conveyed mainly through a curriculum that exposes students to the idea that knowledge is a contested terrain fraught with implications for culture, history, ideology and power. Critical multiculturalists present subordinated and oppositional knowledge to students that disrupts mainstream intellectual traditions. This may activate students' social awareness but it stops short of offering students guidance on

how to define themselves and navigate the politically, racially charged social world of White-dominated classrooms. Critical pedagogy typically offers fewer curricular prescriptions because educators are encouraged to incorporate students' lives into the construction of the course. In this way, students are ensured that the curriculum is relevant because their lives are part of the course material. This personal relevancy becomes their motivation for learning how to critically examine and make meaning of their social worlds. Life experience as text, critical thinking and learning how to dialogue about their ideas are identified as tools that enable students to "dismantle the master's house" (Lorde 1984, 110). Critical pedagogy empowers students by providing them with the kind of academic training that benefits students regardless of their political stance. However, it falls short in preparing students to address or otherwise respond to the conflicts that emerge in cross-racial interactions like the ones experienced by participants in this study. By contrast, feminist educators have been very studious of cross-racial conflict and treat their pedagogy as a training ground for building coalitions and inclusive communities. Yet their aims to empower students to find their voice and work through racial differences are not necessarily goals shared by students of color. In the second half of this chapter I will present my findings on how students of color revised notions of empowerment in ways that were congruent with their experiences in White-dominated classrooms.

Critical Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism emerged out of the civil rights movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. During this time African Americans and other racial ethnic minorities mobilized to demand that the U.S. grant them inalienable rights as citizens

and as humans the same as were extended to White Americans. This movement took hold in colleges and universities when students and faculty called for ethnic studies departments to be established as a way of honoring the intellectual traditions and cultural contributions of people of color. In some cases students and faculty forcibly occupied buildings on campus until the administration agreed to form academic programs such as Asian American Studies, Chicano Studies and Native American Studies.

While the multicultural movement had a radical beginning, as an education-based concept it has evolved into numerous translations that reflect varying levels of commitment to those original radical ideals and methods. Multicultural education is really a large category that encompasses a wide spectrum of views, some of which are in opposition to one another (Nieto 2004; Banks and Banks 2007). It is important to recognize that each model is based on a particular understanding of the barriers that prevent U.S. society from being inclusive and equitable for all. Scholar-practitioners developed relevant educational strategies based on their respective definitions of the problem preventing multiculturalism. For example the *human relations* approach treats the problem of multiculturalism as a lack of sensitivity to cultural difference and employs a curriculum that promotes interpersonal harmony and unity. On the left end of the spectrum is *critical multiculturalism* which charges mainstream society of racism and other forms of social oppression. Critical multiculturalists take the stance that schools are social institutions governed by dominant groups that makes them politically charged and contentious domains. These educators posit that schooling, education and knowledge are sites in which

culture, history, ideology, and power are contested through academic engagement and institutional policies. Critical multiculturalists set out to transform established norms, ideologies and institutions in ways that fundamentally restructure society to become more accessible, inclusive, equitable and just as opposed to other forms of multicultural education that set out to refine the process of cultural assimilation.

As an educational movement, critical multiculturalism points to mainstream values and histories as ideological tools that hold inequality in place from generation to generation. For example, the myth of meritocracy is a widely accepted imperative that calls for individuals to "pull themselves up by their bootstraps." This mantra is infused into many U.S. social institutions from the media to schools, but is rarely problematized for ignoring the very real social barriers that make it difficult for members of marginalized groups to achieve the American Dream. Furthermore it ignores the ways in which members of dominant society, by virtue of their race, gender, wealth and other factors, are often granted privileges that allow them to elevate their status and position without having to submit to the rigors of hard work and the pains of subordination. Critical multiculturalists set out to deconstruct these commonly accepted yet noxious ideologies by presenting students with alternative knowledge sets. According to Berlant and Warner (1994), their project "proposes to reorder the world of expert knowledge" (115). Berlant and Warner write:

> For its adherents, multiculturalism increasingly stands for a desire to rethink canons in the humanities – to rethink their boundaries and their function. It also stands for the desire to find the cultural and political norms appropriate to more heterogeneous societies within and across nations, including norms for the production and transmission of knowledges. (1994, 114)

With the content of knowledge as the focal point, critical multiculturalists invest much of their energy towards formulating a curriculum that validates subordinated knowledge. This is treated as essential for reeducating students to restructure society and cultivate alternative ideologies and practices that promote access, inclusion, and equity for people of all backgrounds.

Critical multicultural educators are also intent on building a living curriculum for students. This means that students are encouraged to study historical and cultural movements not as a vestige of the past, but as social forces that continue to impact our lives today. Giroux elaborates on this particular educational objective:

> An insurgent multiculturalism must challenge the task of merely re-presenting cultural differences in the curriculum; it must also educate students of the necessity for linking a justice of multiplicity to struggles over real material conditions that structure everyday life. (1994, 340)

With the view of schools, education and knowledge as the site of political struggles, proponents of this approach concentrate on formulating a curriculum that disrupts traditional content. Students are provided with subordinated knowledge that they are encouraged to bring to life through political awareness and social action. Critical multiculturalists rely heavily on curriculum content as the vehicle for empowering students.

Empowerment in Critical Multiculturalism

Empowerment in critical multiculturalism is largely concerned with inducting students into a critical knowledge base that debunks mainstream myths about meritocracy, progress, equal opportunity, national unity, and civic responsibility. Practitioners aim to re-educate students through an intellectual training that delves

into historical struggles against oppression and for liberation. This type of radical academic training is intended to awaken students' political consciousness, and prepare them for dialogue, whether with opponents or potential allies, that will assist them in building a platform upon which to engage in social action. This educational project places a heavy emphasis on learning and unlearning the discourses of "national identity, the construction of historical memory, the purpose of schooling and the meaning of democracy" (Giroux 1994, 325). In other words students are taught to unlearn dominant ideologies and to learn transgressive forms of knowledge that will assist them in building a critical conceptual language for talking about oppression, resistance, empowerment and social change.

For example, a critical multiculturalist would be inclined to deconstruct the idea of "America as a melting pot" in which people from diverse racial ethnic backgrounds are assimilated so fully into American culture that their respective racial ethnic backgrounds are no longer identifiable, meaningful or necessary. Critical multiculturalists may draw out how the norms of colorblindness bolster the notion that race should not and does not impact a person's life chances. This seemingly benign and liberal view actually feeds into the commonly held belief that race is a problem because people of color will not "let go of the past" such as the history and effects of the institution of slavery. In this way mainstream society frames racism as a problem created by people of color when they speak out about the abuses they face and otherwise refuse to abandon their culture and wholly adopt the values of dominant culture. Critical multiculturalists would likely present students with revisionist historical accounts of how people of color were systematically

excluded from American society from the internment of the Japanese during World War II to Land Removal Acts that removed thousands of Native Americans off of land they had lived on and cultivated for generations. Additionally, course readings would offer a discussion of how marginalized groups resisted and mobilized to form various liberation movements to restore their cultural integrity and secure civil rights for their communities.

The Shortcomings of Empowerment in Critical Multicultural Education

Critical multicultural education challenges students to develop a political awareness and instructs them in a conceptual language to think and dialogue about their social worlds. Regardless of a student's political orientation, this amounts to a sort of advanced academic training that prepares students to interrogate texts, research topics and formulate their claims for or against any issue. However, the academic benefits of a curriculum-based notion of empowerment may not be enough to compensate for the havoc it can wreak on students' psyche. An immersion into histories of oppression and students' newly developed awareness of the scope and depth of subordination can have adverse effects on a students morale. While becoming empowered intellectually, they may regress emotionally into depression, angst, and paralysis. This may damage students' ability to navigate the immediate institutional and relational challenges they face as students of color in White-dominated classrooms. Students begin to see that their predicament as members of racially subordinated groups is worse than they knew and has been going on for centuries on a global level. As the same time they became more cognizant of the

various forms of racism they face on campus and in classrooms every day. This is actually a fulfillment of the goals of empowerment in critical multiculturalism as articulated by Henry Giroux to "educate students of the necessity for linking a justice of multiplicity to struggles over real material conditions that structure everyday life" (Giroux 1994, 340). Yet it is counterproductive because if in the process of becoming able to see and read oppression students become immobilized, then they are in effect unavailable to work towards their own personal survival and unable take on the emotional heavy lifting of coalition work (Reagon and Smith 1983; Rosenthall 2001).

For example, Eva, a participant in my study was exposed to a class that employed a critical multicultural curriculum by introducing students of color to historical struggles of oppression and liberation, while at the same time linked course material to students' understandings about everyday life. She described the class as having the following characteristics:

> Eva: The course topic was really about everything. We talked about every race. We always had a guest speaker from every race come in and talk to us about race and communication, and how media has something to do with how we're influenced, and stuff like that.

Eva agreed that she felt empowered when the professor helped her unpack the significance of race on society and everyday life:

> Eva: I think the only class I ever took that was really empowering like that was probably my Ethnic Studies course that I took with Professor McKnight.
> I felt a lot … this is where I started to learn to recognize things, you know, and I recognized a lot of things. Like oh, when that person does this, they actually mean this. Like, I never noticed that when I said my high school teacher had said, "Oh, I have a lot of Black friends," that really racially, she's probably trying to save herself because she's scared that

> we're going to call her racist, you know, and [I learned] some vocabulary words and stuff. Even though sometimes I felt like I wasn't growing, I was growing, I just, I guess that sometimes I was trying to stop myself…
>
> Deanna: I don't understand.
>
> Eva: Because when I started noticing all these things, like I started to get more sad and depressed, and just like, oh my gosh, what am I doing here? I could just be a housewife or something, what am I doing with myself? Why am I putting myself through this? I should have went to somewhere else. I should have went to a different school, you know. Maybe it would have been better. … but I really did feel empowered in that class, even though I really didn't want to admit it, because it was so overwhelming to hear all these things that I know I've been through in my life, and to actually know that they were actually racially motivated, you know?

The source of Eva's empowerment was linked to the experience of having her awareness opened up to seeing social reality from a critical race perspective. This awareness and conceptual language led Eva to critically reflect on racialized experiences she had as a high school student and currently as a college student. Eva found new meanings when she examined her experiences and while she became clearer about certain racialized situations Eva struggled to understand her previously passive role in racist encounters:

> Eva: It [the course] went over a lot of topics, and I guess that was what was so overwhelming about it, was because all these things have something to do with where we are [now] in the situation. And for me, I kind of was still stuck on "who am I", you know. Like, I'm coming to college and everyone says when you come into college you kind of figure out who you are, and I was still stuck on "who am I" you know. Still stuck on how I was treated in high school, and how I found out that all those things that I was treated in high school were racially prejudice or were racist, but I never really noticed until now. And like, I don't know, it just got so overwhelming that I was just like, wow. I'm empowered, but at the same time exhausted.

Eva felt empowered intellectually through the development of a socio-political awareness. However, the course did not assist her in understanding the role she played in oppression, resistance and liberation. Earnestly engaged with the curriculum and her own process of self-development, Eva found herself simply exhausted by the implications of the critical multicultural curriculum that focused on social problems rather than preparing students to understand their positionality within these contested social realms.

Rivera and Poplin (1995) raise a similar critique against critical multiculturalism by questioning what it offers students to help them navigate the treacherous social terrain it so thoroughly maps out for them. The authors present the case of Juan, a Latino youth who wrote an essay about his life in a high school class taught from a critical multiculturalist orientation. In keeping with the pedagogy of linking the curriculum with students' lived experiences, Juan explained that many factors led to his leaving high school including growing up in a physically abusive household, his mother's drug abuse, his economic need for full-time employment and the pressure he was getting to join a gang. Critical multiculturalism can certainly help Juan unpack his situation theoretically and conceptualize the impact of race, ethnicity, gender and other forms of oppression have on his life circumstances. However, it is unclear as to how this academic analysis will support Juan's everyday survival, keep him in school and lead him to become academically successful. Rivera and Poplin pose the following questions:

> Will raising these sociopolitical issues at this moment inspire Juan to fight his own drinking, help him come to school safe, help him reach his mother or little brother? Will these kinds of analyses currently help him hang on or encourage him to let go of life. (1995, 241)

Critical multiculturalism aims to support students intellectually in having an academic and conceptual language to examine their social realities. This might lead students of color on the path of empowerment and social change. Conversely, students of color may become more susceptible to depression and nihilism. Critical multiculturalism is theoretically responsive to "human suffering," but it fails to instruct students in how to navigate racial oppression in their daily lives and offers them little by way of hope. Rivera and Poplin query, "Is not their hope more an abstract hope for the world and not a specific hope for Juan?"

Critical Pedagogy

While critical multiculturalism places a heavy emphasis on curriculum content, proponents of critical pedagogy have aimed their critiques towards the *process* of education as well as its underlying principles and purposes. One reason for this difference is that critical educators posit that students are valid holders and producers of knowledge. Therefore, they call for the curriculum to be shaped directly from students' life experiences and social worlds, rather than dictated to them by an authority-figure with firmly rooted institutional or dominant group interests. Therefore, many critical educators are less prescriptive about their course curriculum seeking instead to invite students' input. Not only does this design make the educational experience a relevant one for students but it also creates the desired effect of disrupting the teacher's authority. Empowerment in critical pedagogy is organized around the process of developing students' critical thinking skills,

assisting them in cultivating a political awareness, and instilling in them the belief that they are valid knowledge holders/producers.

Origins of Critical Pedagogy

Although the inception of critical pedagogy is debatable, many scholars pay homage to Brazilian educator Paulo Freire as the key innovator of this radical educational movement. In the early 1970s, Freire was exiled from Brazil for his writings that demanded that the interests of Brazilian peasants guide educational policy and practice. After leaving the University of Recife, he became a visiting scholar at Harvard University, and two years later published the first edition of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire 1972). Many North American based scholars immediately began looking to Freire as the guru of an educational philosophy and practice that addressed the charged political contexts of a country in the midst of major historical upheaval and social movements such as the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement. Critical pedagogy gave notable scholars such as Michael Apple, John Kozol, Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, Donald Macedo, and Ira Shor a place to critique how traditional approaches to education contributed to social inequality and injustice. They contended that education must be wrested from the hands of dominant groups, and applied towards the liberation of subordinated groups.

There are many versions of critical pedagogy precisely because of the imperative to apply it to the specific social political contexts of students' global and local realities. For example, Myles Horton employed critical pedagogy at the

Highlander Folk School during the civil rights movement. Horton, Septima Clark and other associates formulated a pedagogy that would prepare adult learners to be informed and active participants in demonstrations against racial segregation laws. Their aims were a departure from traditional forms of adult education that sought to re-integrate adults into the mainstream world of work. Highlander Folk School used critical pedagogy to problematize the taken for granted aims of adult education, and reconstruct a process that would empower African Americans and Whites to transform society.

Critical educators set out to formulate classroom practices that correspond with their philosophical aims. In many cases the instructor is advised to depart from lecture-based teaching and arrange student seating in a circle as a way of reinforcing the idea that she and the students are on equal footing as participants in the educational process. While critical multiculturalism tends to provide students with critical knowledge, critical pedagogy sets out to train students in how to generate knowledge for themselves. Therefore the activities of problem-posing, critical thinking and dialogue are paramount. Problem-posing encourages students to identify a social issue that significantly impacts their lives. Students then proceed to examine the issue to uncover its historical roots, the supporting ideological frameworks, and the political implications.

Once they begin to research the problem, students are urged to question the data in an effort to determine whether or not dominant group interests are being served by various discourses. The knowledge that students produce through problem-posing and critical thinking is then utilized in dialogue where students

practice articulating their viewpoints to opponents and allies. This kind of academic training is often conceptualized as preparing students for radical democratic participation. It is transformative because it guides students to intellectual tools and practices that empower them to deconstruct their social worlds and re-envision a society structured by the interests of subordinated groups. Another reason why it is transformative is that the curriculum and inquiry is mostly comprised of students' experiences and the issues that are of most concern to them. McLaren states:

> The pedagogy that I propose *takes the problems and needs of the students themselves as its starting point*. On the one hand, a pedagogy based on student experience encourages us to analyze the dominant forms of knowledge that shape student experiences; on the other hand, it attempts to provide students with the means to examine their own particular experiences and subordinate knowledge forms. We must help students analyze their own experiences so as to illuminate the processes by which those experiences were produced, legitimated, or disconfirmed. (1989, 226)

Thus, critical pedagogues define the route to student empowerment as teaching them that their life experiences are a valid starting place for transforming themselves into empowered holders/producers of knowledge and informed active participants in a democratic society.

Empowerment in Critical Pedagogy

Student empowerment within critical pedagogy occurs when students actively participate in their social worlds as valid knowledge holders/producers and agents of social change. This is especially geared towards students from historically marginalized groups whose survival and overall well-being is viewed as the barometer for determining the degree of equity, justice and humaneness present in U.S. society. The skills of inquiry, critical thinking and dialogue are the specific

practices that indicate students are empowered to discern the vestiges of oppression in their social worlds, carry themselves as valid knowledge holders/producers, and are spurred to social action. Bartolome posits that the methods of critical pedagogy "create conditions that enable subordinated students to move from their usual passive position to one of active and critical engagement" (2003, 412). McLaren defines student empowerment in the following way:

> I am using the term *empowerment* to refer to the process through which students learn to critically appropriate knowledge existing outside their immediate experience in order to broaden their understanding of themselves, the world, and the possibilities of transforming the take-for-granted assumptions about the way we live...empowerment is gained from knowledge and social relations that dignify one's own history, language, and cultural traditions. But empowerment means more than self-confirmation. It also refers to the process by which students learn to question and selectively appropriate those aspects of the dominant culture that will provide them with the basis for defining and transforming, rather than merely serving, the wider social order. (1989, 186)

According to critical educators, students are empowered not only when they feel validated as individuals, but when they claim a certain level of authority both intellectually and politically. Ira Shor talks about a "pedagogy which empowers students to intervene in the making of history," and "to be their own agents for social change, their own creators of democratic culture" (1980, 7).

A key indication as to whether or not a student is empowered is the kinds of questions they ask about their own experience and social worlds. Kampol (1994) gives an example of critical empowerment in the case of a teacher who became a student of the critical pedagogy approach. What is distinct is the teacher's willingness to reflect critically on her teaching practice and the impact it has on

students. Kanpol encourages the critical teacher to take up the following lines of inquiry in respect to their own teaching practices:

> For whom and why is the decision made? Why would I need an alternative teaching methodology? How are my decisions affected by the traditional setting I am in? Am I reinforcing stereotypes? Am I reproducing inequities? How can I undercut inequities? How can I challenge alienating accountability measures set by the school? What forms of alternative testing (other than grades) exist that do not track students? How does my teaching affect race, class, and gender? (1994, 53)

In critical pedagogy, the educator's role is to empower student-learners by training them to interrogate taken for granted knowledge and develop their own informed perspective through inquiry (which includes both problem-posing and dialogue) and by cross-referencing subordinated knowledge. The hope is that students will see the necessity of taking a radical perspective that is intent on transforming society rather than assimilating to the status quo.

Problems with Empowerment in Critical Pedagogy

The notion of empowerment in critical pedagogy has already faced the critique of scholars who discovered disturbing incongruencies between theory and practice. One of the major discrepancies examined has been the critical educator's attempt to diminish her intellectual authority while maintaining institutional authority. This gives students the false impression that they are in control of the educational process when in fact the professor retains the power and the duty to evaluate students' performance and progress.

I have experienced this predicament first hand as a university instructor for courses in multicultural education. I used the critical pedagogy methods of inquiry

and dialogue, and encouraged students to research and explore differing views on particular issues. My questions were open-ended in a problem-posing fashion, and I studied and lectured on issues that students identified as important for them to understand. Nonetheless, students reported that they still felt obligated to take the same political stance as me. Although I was not pedantic, they discerned my political interests by my teaching methods and the social problems discussed in class (e.g., immigration, bilingual education, Whiteness theory). I viewed this dynamic between students and me as a power issue. Even though I tried to "give" students power and intellectual freedom in class, I remained the one vested with institutional authority to assign grades. This became a high stakes issue for some students who waited until their final semester before graduation to take the course which was a college requirement. For both educators and students, intellectual authority is often conflated with and confused by institutional authority. Critical educators may set out to empower students through the methods of critical pedagogy but the institutional context means that the professor is still in control of a student's academic fate. This critique calls attention to the barriers inherent within institutional contexts. Gore writes:

> Strong sense of human agency and optimism pervades claims about the teacher as empower-er in ways which portray the teacher's role as crucial and sometimes even as omnipotent. … My major concerns are that these claims to empowerment attribute extraordinary abilities to the teacher, and hold a view of agency which risks ignoring the context(s) of teachers' work. (1992, 57)

The institutional constraints often get obfuscated by the critical educators attempt to elevate students to a level of authority equal to their own.

The issue of teacher-authority relates to another problem of empowerment in critical pedagogy. Some scholar-practitioners have asked the question: Is the educator in a position to make good on their promise to empower students? More specifically, what qualifies the critical educator to empower students? Critical feminist educators have raised serious doubts about this prospect noting that identity politics in addition to institutional constraints have created experiences for students that were more troubling than empowering. One such critical feminist educator, Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989), planned her pedagogy carefully in accordance with the Freirean and antiracist principles. The students enrolled in her course were a mixture of men and women from both the U.S. and international backgrounds, including Asian American, Chicano/a, Jewish, Puerto Rican, Anglo-European, Asian, African, Icelandic, and Canadian. Ellsworth's students reported the following litany of reactions to a critical pedagogy that was designed for their empowerment through dialogue:

> Things were not being said for a number of reasons. These included fear of being misunderstood and/or disclosing too much and becoming too vulnerable; memories of bad experiences in other contexts of speaking out; resentment that other oppressions (sexism, heterosexism, fat oppression, classism, anti-Semitism) were being marginalized in the name of addressing racism - guilt for feeling such resentment; confusion about levels of trust and commitment surrounding those who were allies to another group's struggles; resentment by some students of color for feeling that they were expected to disclose "more" and once again take the burden of doing the pedagogic work of educating White students/professors about the consequences of White middle-class privilege; and resentment by White students for feeling that they had to prove they were not the enemy. (Ellsworth 1989, 108)

Ellsworth came to the conclusion that the social historical contexts and relations of power made it impossible for students to engage each other in dialogue from positions of equality. As described in the above excerpt, there were constant power

struggles between students in terms of whose voice was allowed to speak authoritatively and which oppressions would be spoken about most prominently. In the end, Ellsworth became convinced that neither her expertise nor intentions as an instructor, nor the principles and practices of critical pedagogy provided adequate guidance for addressing this ever-present phenomenon. Her own racial identity contributed to the classroom dynamics, about this Ellsworth conceded "as an Anglo, middle-class professor in C&I 607, I could not unproblematically 'help' a student of color find her/his voice as a student of color."

Orner (1992) elaborated on the contradictions created by identity politics and critical pedagogy's aims both to value student knowledge and to empower them. In her assessment, critical pedagogy worked from a hidden, patronizing assumption of youth/student as Other. It called for students to voice their experiences while constraining their voices in a fixed notion of student identity. Put another way, critical pedagogy failed to consider how students were positioned differently in relation to power in the classroom. As Boler put it:

> All speech is not free…all voices do not carry the same weight. As part of Western democracies, different voices pay different prices for the words one chooses to utter. Some speech results in the speaker being assaulted or even killed. (2004, 321)

Intended to be the purveyors of democracy, college classrooms also issue a price that students must pay for speaking, and a student's racial identity has a strong influence on how that price is set. Samuel and Burney (2003) found that Asian students in a predominantly White classroom were marginalized from the class discussion as a result of their utterances and their silences. White American male students controlled the direction of dialogue and topic development. This study suggested

that there are both social and academic consequences for students positioned in the margins of the college classroom.

Based on my findings, I posit a third critique of empowerment as a project in critical pedagogy. Critical educators set out to validate and incorporate students' experiences into defining the curriculum and purposes of education. However, they often fail to recognize that at times the lived experiences that are most immediate are the ones they are having as students of color in White-dominated classrooms. One participant stated that she felt empowered in an ethnic studies class with a curriculum geared towards developing a critical knowledge about the people of color and encouraged students to articulate their perspectives in an open dialogue format. However, in her own words, Arianna felt empowered in the class because the White students were held accountable for racially ignorant and insensitive remarks. Arianna explained:

Deanna: Have you had any other empowering experiences this year?

Arianna: Professor Moana's class was cool. …we were talking about the overthrow of Hawaii, and there's this scholar-activist - I can't pronounce the first name [Haunani], but her last name is Trask. She's really aggressive about how she approaches the Hawaiian movement. And so she showed a clip, and a lot of White people did not like it.

Deanna: What was it a clip of?

Arianna: Of her speaking, she's like, "We are not tourists. this is our land." It [the video] was like, it's everything I would have said, but, I mean, I would have said it the same way, but they [White students] saw it as her being aggressive and her being really angry. ..

And then it was kind of like brown versus White. They totally were hostile, there was this mess. But I thought it was

> empowering because they finally got challenged, and they didn't know what to do.
>
> Because we started pulling out readings and stuff, and I was like, "Well if I'm crazy, why is this PhD saying this, and blah, blah, blah," and they couldn't really back up because I was like, and then I pulled out some Peggy McIntosh and she's like, I was like, "She's even White,' and they just kind of looked at me and said I was crazy. And I had all the Polynesians like, "Yeah, she's [Mcintosh] is White," and it was really funny. And Dr. Moana just kind of let it revolve into our own discussion, and she just stepped back. If it gets a little bad she'll step in and be like, "Okay," …that was probably one of the most empowering out of her class.

Arianna felt empowered by the course content and the methods of dialogue used by the professor. However, they had this effect on Arianna by validating her critical perspective on race-related issues. Also key in the scenario described above is that Arianna was empowered not simply because she was learning critical knowledge and being validated as knowledge holder/producer. The power dynamics were transformed in such a way that students of color who articulated views oppositional to the mainstream were highly valued rather than receiving the usual treatment of stigmatization or dismissal in White-dominated classrooms. I asked Arianna to clarify for me what was empowering about her experience in Dr. Moana's class:

> Deanna: Well I want to go back to Dr. Moana's class and the idea of you feeling empowered in it. Tell me if I'm hearing you right. It was empowering because you got to speak your opinion about I guess racial dynamics, at least that video you guys watched, and also about issues that were coming up in class, or that came up related to White students. Empowering because, I don't know, it sounds kind of like the teacher was giving you a place for dialogue, was validating that you have something important to say, by choosing your essay. Help me out here.
>
> Arianna: Yeah, it was just, in a sense, it felt like the people of color being catered to instead of the other way around, like the White students usually get catered to…. So we were being

> catered to, and we were learning, educating, and we were enjoying what we were learning,

Arianna's testimony indicated that Dr. Moana's class was empowering because of the curriculum the pedagogy, and importantly, a real change in the direction of power that affirmed the presence and views of students of color in the classroom.

Feminist Pedagogy

> In this book we describe the ways of knowing that women cultivated and learned to value, ways we have come to believe are powerful but have been neglected and denigrated by the dominant intellectual ethos of our time.
>
> For many women, the "real" and valued lessons learned did not necessarily grow out of their academic work but in relationships with friends and teachers, life crises, and community involvements. Indeed we observed that women often feel alienated in academic settings and experience "formal" education as either peripheral or irrelevant to their central interests and development.
>
> --Belenky et al.

Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind (Belenky et al. 1986) quickly emerged as one of the most influential texts in the field of Women Studies. It put forth the notion that women were not only different in their styles of interaction or in the treatment they receive in certain academic fields, but also in the way they produce knowledge. This text was an epistemological revelation in its central premise that relationships both inside and outside of the classroom are a vital component of women cultivating an identity as valid knowledge holders. This is particularly the case when women's relationships (e.g., with their families, friends, classmates and teachers) and the insights gleaned from

their life experiences function as a network for making meaning, and affirm the methods by which women come to know and the content of their knowledge.

The philosophical and academic turn towards Women Studies compelled some feminist educators to not only place a high value on what women know and how women come to know, but also consider how their taken for granted teaching methods serve patriarchal interests. As the relational aspects of women-generated and women-centered knowledge became more accepted as a legitimate scholarly field of study, feminist educators began to look for ways to weave students more actively into the construction of knowledge in the classroom. As feminists, these radical educators were also acutely aware of the politics of education. They also posed global questions about whose interests were served through traditional approaches to education. At the same time they attuned themselves to the relational politics of teaching and learning, and in this way built a research agenda that set feminist pedagogy apart from critical multiculturalism and critical pedagogy.

While the end goals of the three radical pedagogies are aligned, feminist pedagogy is distinct in its premise that the politics of society and knowledge strongly influence relationships in the classroom especially among students and teachers from different social backgrounds. Therefore feminist educators use the classroom context as both a training ground for preparing future social activists and as a site in which to practice moment-by-moment the delicate balance between personal empowerment and community participation. Mayberry and Rose write about this unique aspect of feminist pedagogy:

> To achieve these liberatory goals, feminist educators develop and use classroom process skills, many of which are used in collaborative learning

> environments. Informal relations among class members are built by initiating student-centered experiences such as group activities and group reports. Great care and skill go into developing a learning environment where students work together to design group activities that demonstrate an awareness of the race, class, and gender dynamics that permeate the larger society. Through dialogue and conversation, students and teachers negotiate a curriculum that articulates their needs and concerns. These classroom strategies are designed explicitly to empower students to apply their learning to social action and transformation, recognize their ability to act to create a more humane social order, and become effective voices of change within the broader social world. (1999, 7)

Collective work in the production of knowledge, dialogue and in determining the topics around which consciousness-raising should take place are customary elements of the feminist classroom. Additionally, the teacher and students are held accountable for making the classroom a safe place in which everyone feels welcomed to participate in this project of inclusion.

Student empowerment in feminist pedagogy occurs in two parts. First empowerment is achieved when students understand that all knowledge is constructed from a particular social context with respective political interests. This is especially empowering for members of marginalized groups who come to understand how mainstream ideologies and institutions, despite the espousal of meritocracy, equality and inclusion are in fact western cultural mythologies that have been instrumental in hegemonic relations of power, privilege and domination. Secondly, students are empowered when they feel safe participating in the social context of the classroom. When students develop a critical mastery of course material and apply their lived experience in ways that build their confidence in speaking as a valid knowledge holder/producer, they are on the pathway to empowerment in a feminist classroom.

Student Empowerment in the Feminist Classroom: Two Elements

Students are empowered in a feminist classroom when they have mastered the course material and at the same time develop an understanding that all texts (from academic treatises to media sources) are socially constructed. As students enter into this critical awareness about so-called authoritative texts, feminist educators hope they will begin to find value in their own standpoint as students and as members of society. There is a strong imperative here especially for students from marginalized groups to author their own experiences as they are so often rendered invisible or inconsequential to mainstream culture. Maher and Tetreault (1994) conducted a study in which they identified four elements that make the feminist classroom 'feminist.' I use two of these themes – *mastery* and *voice*, to describe the framework of student empowerment.

Mastery is a term that often alludes to the requirement that students absorb the traditional curriculum without question. It would be a mistake to think that a feminist classroom could care less if students learn academic material or if the curriculum lacked academic standards and rigor. In fact, students in feminist classrooms are often asked to rigorously study the content of a text, its mode of representation, and its epistemological standpoint. One key distinction of mastery in the feminist classroom is that the educator tries to make transparent that all academic texts are a product of a particular social location at a particular historical moment that marks it with cultural, political and ideological agendas. Students are taught that there is no such thing as neutrality not even in a quantitative study that relies on scientific objectivity. The notion of mastery is made more complex when the

feminist educator begins to consider the differences in what students know when they enter the classroom and what they may need to learn in order to find empowerment as critical thinkers. For example, do White students and Black students come into a discussion about racism with the same knowledge base? At the same time students are repeatedly asked to give up the idea that any subject can be wholly mastered. Instead, students are guided to build confidence in asking questions that uncover the multiple dimensions of an issue rather than aiming to know all there is to know about a given topic. Ultimately, mastery empowers students by providing them with critical academic training, and by assisting them in reframing what it means to be a valid knowledge holder. Maher and Tetreault offer a description of mastery based on their observations in feminist classrooms:

> Phillips [the feminist teacher] pushed her students to be critical of the scholarly texts they were reading those texts denied their reality…This group was able to offer a stronger criticism of sociology "from the margins"…Here students challenged the courses and aims of sociological knowledge, and explicitly used their own life experience, as well as interdisciplinary knowledge, to do so. Phillips's class demonstrated a conception of mastery not as the acquisition of conventional knowledge but as more culturally positioned interpretation – or reinterpretation—from the perspective of previously silenced group. (1994, 65)

The voices of members of subordinate groups are often turned to as a source of insight into the complexities and contradictions of mainstream discourse, and for guidance as to how to revise conventional wisdom and institutional polices to become more equitable. Thus, mastery is a notion that is linked to Voice in the quest of empowerment for students.

Feminist educators often encourage students to "find your voice" in a metaphoric and literal, embodied sense. The underlying premise is that the gendered

body has been systematically relegated to a social location on the margins of androcentric society. This results in distinctive forms of socialization, access to subjugated knowledge, and a unique experience of the world to put it simply. Feminist educators encourage all students to develop an awareness of their social location as women, men and members of other social groups. At the same time, they posit that women's status as outsiders in a male-dominated society have made them "more capable than privileged men of identifying harmful non-conscious and androcentric aspects of theory and culture" (Ennis and Sinacore 2005, 32). Thus women, members of historically marginalized groups, and students are likely to find that in a feminist classroom lived experience is a valid and valued source of knowledge. When students speak to their experiences and emotions, and juxtapose that knowledge against academic texts, an empowered intellectual is born.

Giving voice is also important to the feminist classroom because it represents the idea that truth are socially constructed through a network of relationships, and that there is no ultimate truth to be known. When students give voice they are participating in a dialogic process of discovering a given topic from as many perspectives as is available in the classroom. This reinforces the idea that truth is not a singular or a fixed reality. It also demonstrates the value of multiple perspectives and marginal voices. Therefore, the feminist educator establishes a prerequisite that the classroom must be a safe space for students to give voice in order for them to achieve and practice empowerment. The assumption is that when students are assured that their remarks and perspectives will be embraced, affirmed and engaged they "can speak from a fully conscious, informed, coherent, "authentic" sense of self

(Ennis and Sinacore 2005). When students find their voices it signifies that they have developed a strong sense of their own personal identity and have found a platform upon which to speak into the democratic conversation. In their effort to make the classroom a safe space, feminist educators have, more than most radical educators, tried to figure out both practically and theoretically how to assist students in having cross-racial dialogue.

Feminists' and Students' Goals for Empowerment: A Disconnect

While feminist educators have made outstanding attempts to construct pedagogy and knowledge *with* students, their aims for student empowerment have not necessarily been congruent with students' versions, especially students from historically marginalized groups. Scholar-practitioners of feminist pedagogy have generated some of the most insightful and important accounts of how the politics of race and identity undermine the project of student empowerment. By interrogating their own successes and failures, their work has provoked fundamental reconsiderations of the theory and practice of feminist and other radical pedagogies. Many feminist educators consciously chose to incorporate the aims of antiracism after recognizing that race mattered in predominantly White classrooms where students of color were present and where the overarching topic was social justice-oriented. The politics of race and identity impacted the relationships between students and the teacher in ways that led to social tensions and as a result negatively influenced the entire educational experience. The feminist insistence that the classroom be a safe space compelled several scholar-practitioners to figure out how

to facilitate dialogue and learning across race. In this quest, a few scholars began to question whether their notion of empowerment was congruent with that of students.

Feminist educators often ask students to open up to the embodied and emotional aspects of education as part of the process of mastery and voice. However, their goals to prepare students academically, intellectually and politically at times overlooks the kinds of moves students may be compelled to make on the "rocky road to feminist empowerment" (Fisher 2001, 81). For example, Fisher, a feminist educator, discusses a case in which one of her students wants to reveal to the class her sexual orientation as a lesbian:

> *Kip sits in my office talking about the possibility of coming out in class. I acknowledge that this act always involves risks, but I assure her that if she wants to take them, she will have my support. We talk about the invisibility of lesbians in our school and how she might deal with homophobic reactions from the class. I suspect that some members of this apparently heterosexual group might direct toward Kip the fear and anger that they have hesitated to direct toward me. I am not sure how much I can trust the students to respond to Kip in the spirit of feminist discourse.* (2001, 81)

Fisher expresses her uncertainty as to whether or not she can make the classroom space safe enough for Kip to come out. This points out that although supportive of students acting in empowered ways, the feminist educator may not be able to facilitate that process or create the necessary conditions for risky disclosures to be handled with care. Interestingly, Fisher offers to try to prepare students intellectually and emotionally for Kip's upcoming disclosure, but Kip wants what feminist pedagogy has in a sense promised – protection:

> Since I cannot be certain how class members will react and how Kip, in turn, will respond to them, I know I will have to be alert to many possibilities. I know, too, that I do not want the situation to turn into one that hurts Kip and reinforces homophobia. I talk to Kip about whether she would like me to lay some more ground for her, perhaps using a visualization in which students

> have to pay attention to the heterosexist assumptions around which so much academic activity is organized. She says no but hopes I will step in if the reactions become too aggressive. I realize how much trust is involved here. (2001, 87)

In this precarious triangle of trust, Kip is relying on Fisher to make good on her pedagogical promise to make the classroom a safe space. As Fisher stated earlier, she is not sure if she can accomplish this requirement for Kip's empowerment. This problem within the feminist notion of empowerment is similar to the trouble with the teacher's tenuous relationship with authority in critical pedagogy. In times like these the feminist educator must either rhetorically or literally ask students," what *can* "we" do for "you" (Gore 1992, 54)?

In the case of Jones (1999), it became clear that her fundamental premise of what kinds of experiences would be socially and educationally empowering for students were at odds with students' own desires, particularly those of students of color. Having worked with White Pakeha and Maori/Pacific Islander women students in a Women Studies course, Jones began to wonder, "what if "togetherness" and dialogue-across-difference fail to hold a compellingly positive meaning for subordinate ethnic groups" (Jones 1999, 299)? In pursuit of an answer to her query, Jones, a White Pakeha woman and her co-teacher, Maori woman professor decided to teach the class as two separate cohorts along racial ethnic lines. Students responded to their experience through written journals. White Pakeha students expressed hostility towards the division, while Maori/Pacific Islander students appreciated the experience. The following are comments made by three Maori/Pacific Islander women:

> Not realizing that we would be split up into cultural groups, I prepared myself to argue any point I felt at odds with, with anybody not of a brown skin tone, to enlighten them upon the cultural ideals, values, and beliefs that didn't correspond to their own. It was with audible relief when I realized we were dividing into cultural groups. Brown and White.
>
> I felt validated or even vindicated. Being in a class of Maori and Pacific Island students, I stopped feeling like I was the other. Instead I felt as though I had moved towards the center and stepped into the center where White people normally reside. It felt good.
>
> The different streams also allow Maori and Pacific Island women to identify the issues of feminism amongst their own, as too often the discussions are taken over by...Pakeha women. (Jones 1999, 300-301)

Two contrasting remarks from Pakeha students;

> It doesn't seem right. Could we not learn from each other? Wouldn't it be valuable to share our differences in experience?...It is different reading about it in books, or having it taught by teachers. It is better to hear it straight from the women who are having the experience. It is easier to relate to.
>
> Nothing can be changed unless "we" know and are aware of what needs to be changed. Behind closed doors doesn't help the process change. (Jones 1999, 300-301)

The students of color expressed relief at the separation because it prevented them from having to defend the legitimacy of their viewpoints and the issues that impact their communities. Also important is that Maori/Pacific Islander women felt the freedom to dialogue in racially separate spaces. These women of color commented on how in their own classroom they were able to move into the Center. In other words, students of color indicated that racially separate classroom spaces were empowering because they offered them a rare opportunity to initiate inquiry into their own culture, identify issues of importance within their community, and indulge in sustained engagement "as too often the discussions are taken over by Pakeha women." Part of the answer to Jones' question is that what feminist educators view

as the road to empowerment may undermine what racial ethnic minority students consider to be educationally, socially and personally empowering.

Students' Perspectives on 'Empowerment' in White-Dominated Classrooms

Participants in my study indicated that commonly held views of empowerment were not aligned with their experiences in White-dominated classrooms. On one count this declaration of theirs was not surprising because I interviewed students of color about their experiences of racial dynamics in all of their classes in general, not necessarily in courses that were taught by practitioners of radical educational theories. A majority of their professors relied on more traditional approaches to teaching which rarely, if ever, marked student empowerment as a learning objective. However, what I found compelling was students' responses when I asked them if they had ever felt empowered in their classes. Whether their answer was yes or no they each proceeded to contest the meaning of the concept itself and offer a revision. As a researcher this was, at first, disconcerting. It seemed as though my question had little to no relevance to participants and should perhaps be discarded. However, I quickly realized that this might become one of the most important questions because students were able to debunk the way the term was used by academic theorists, and provide an interpretation that was derived directly from their own experience and knowledge.

Participants were consistent in stating that the notion of empowerment held distinct meanings in the context of White-dominated college classrooms. They often

abandoned the term 'empowerment' and talked instead about moments in the classroom when they felt "affirmed", "validated", and "energetic". Most often these experiences emerged when students were able to define for themselves their role in classroom interactions, clarify their educational purpose, and answer their own calling to participate in social action for social change. In alignment with the principles of Black Feminist Standpoint Theory, participants entered the process of personal empowerment when they found ways to create a self-defined standpoint in college classrooms and a sense of purpose within their own academic journey.

"What's a Word That's Not 'Empowered'?": Zion

I asked each participant if they had ever experienced a sense of empowerment in their classes. Sometimes students answered in the affirmative and other times they said no. In either case, students often qualified what they meant by 'empowerment' or described the experience they were having in place of it. One African American female participant named Zion explained that empowerment was not the appropriate term because knowing the historical struggles of African American women and comparing that against the contemporary struggles that she and other Black women face, it was difficult to say that they had finally arrived to a place of equity and justice. In Zion's eyes, African Americans and Black women in particular had made progress towards accessing resources, rights and opportunities in American society, but the problem of racism remained constant. In the following excerpt, Zion began to elaborate on why she found the notion of empowerment problematic:

Deanna: So, have you ever had experiences in classes where you felt affirmed or empowered as a Black woman in the class?

Zion: Not an Ethnic Studies class, right?

Deanna: I mean, it could be, I just want to know if ever that's happened and how? … it could be Ethnic Studies.

Zion: Oh, but I'm saying no to that [empowerment in Ethnic Studies classes].

Deanna: Oh, oh, gotcha.

Zion: …Because I think so many times it's like we have to talk about so many bad things in those classes that have happened to us, and that we go through. That it's like so much bad has happened that the good almost doesn't outweigh the bad. … we had to go through from like civil rights, slavery, up until now. And we talk about all that stuff, and it's like we've come so far, but yet so much to go through.

So, it's like I don't know if I feel empowered because Black women, I'm talking about Black women in general, Black women have done so many great things and overcome so many circumstances. Right. And I'm empowered that I know I can do the same if I can -- if I can put my mind to it and I persevere past the pain. Right. But also I don't know if I feel empowered because it's like they did all that, they died, and got shot, and raped, and beat up, but I'm still sitting here today and I still feel like crap. … And it's so like institutionalized. You're like, will we ever break this?

In Ethnic Studies classes, Zion learned a lot about the historical struggles of Black women. This gave Zion a sense that she could also be a survivor as long as she could "persevere past the pain." On the other hand, that she faced many of the same struggles to this day made Zion question how far society had actually progressed towards racial equality. In light of this realization, Zion avoided characterizing her own situation, in classrooms or outside of them, as empowered. Zion searched for a

concept other than ‘empowerment’ that was more congruent with her experiences and perspective:

> Zion: So I don't know if it's like empowered. I don't know the word for it. I feel good at times, I feel very good.
>
> In the classrooms talking about race issues sometimes, because we [African Americans] have done so many things, you know. But at the same time I feel so bad because so many people had to die for me to feel better right now. And I also feel bad because it's like, so my kids are still going to deal with it. You know what I mean.
>
> Like I honestly feel like this, like race will never leave, it just changes. …I mean as in racial inequality. It doesn't leave, it just changes. … So, we had to go through getting beat, right, and then race and stuff. And like now we deal with it in like college, now we deal with what people say to us, but you know what I mean, now we deal with not getting jobs. Like it just changes to me.
>
> … So it's like, I question like, I question like teachers motives a lot. Like so what do, what's your goal? Like what is your goal as teaching people? Like do you think like you're helping?

Zion was proud about the African American struggle for racial equity. However, she found that the same fundamental problems persisted even though the external situation appeared to have changed. Zion was grateful to be informed, but she began to question the professor’s intention in teaching this information. It was as if Zion was posing the question: “What do you expect me to do with this information?” Except this question was not a rhetorical one. It was a question to which Zion genuinely sought an answer. Again, this intellectual, academic, political, and personal dilemma was not what Zion would call ‘empowering’. In the interview Zion began to carve out a definition she thought was more resonant:

> Zion: … what's a word that's not empowered? I can't think of one. I’ve felt good at times, but I don't know if it's empowered.

> Yeah, not empowered I don't think. I think the most empowerment I feel is when I see people, common people, like yourself, and like Dr. Baker [an African American woman professor], and the people who, who are using their time to help. You know what I mean? I think that the local, I think local issues that people address, and local people are more empowering to me than nationally. Because I think that people ignore their local communities, and ignore what people are doing in the communities. Like *Mentors Matter*, like, huge. You know what I mean? Huge.
>
> Like some of the girls still walk up to me and my sister, and they're like thank you. You know what I mean?

Mentors Matter was a program created by Dr. Baker that paired African American women college students with African American high school girls. The college students mentored the high school girls in cultural, social, personal and academic issues during regular meetings, activities and events throughout the year. The particular event that Zion referred to was a conference in which the mentors facilitated dialogues and made presentations to the mentees. The topics discussed were related to study skills, college applications, beauty ideals, and how to negotiate the politics of being a young Black woman in White dominated spaces. These interpersonal relationships were what Zion considered to be empowering perhaps because they were outside of White-dominated classrooms and in a context created specifically by and for Black women. Zion explained why she found local, interpersonal efforts just as profound as national ones:

> Zion: And it's like people are ignoring that, like and saying like that's minute on a scale of, you know what I mean, on the scale of Condoleeza Rice. You know what I'm saying? And I think that, on that level I feel empowered because it's like I see the changes that you can make or I mean not that they're changes, but I see the feelings you can change. Like whether that changes the system, I don't know. But when a girl walks in a class and says, thank you, I feel better. You know what I

> mean? But that she feels better for 10 minutes, I don't care. It's that she felt better. Right. And I think people, people ignore those things, people ignore those common local stuff. I think that's like the most empowerment that I feel.

Zion assumed that the term empowerment was a reference to social change on a global, national level. She said that her studies showed her that the racism as a system has not changed fundamentally. Yet, the impact she had on high school girls by helping them build self-esteem and be informed leaders of their own lives stood in for Zion's definition of empowerment. Zion promoted a local, relational sense of empowerment in which she offers emotional support and practical guidance to African American girls. In turn, she felt like she was able to impact the girls' outlook and ability to establish a positive sense of self within a racially hostile environment. It was as if Zion realized that racism would not be eradicated in her lifetime but that she could help others navigate it in a way that maintained their dignity and integrity.

"It Made Me Feel Good to Let Them Know That I'm Not a Technicality": Rashid

Other students found a sense of empowerment when they were able to dispel the racial stereotypes of their racial ethnic minority group as presented in the media, the curriculum or the views of their classmates. Rashid, an African American male student, explained that it was important for him to share his views with the class as way of demonstrating to them that he did not fit the oft projected image of a Black male on welfare, using drugs and incarcerated. For Rashid the power of talking about these issues was not necessarily in the exercise of "giving voice" but particularly in presenting an image of African American men that contradicted

mainstream views and asserted a more complex, humanized and positive image.

Rashid explained his experience of empowerment in the classroom:

> Deanna: I'm wondering if you've had any experiences in class where you felt like you were empowered, or you felt valued or affirmed.
>
> Rashid: Yes. In my sociology class, a lot of times people just assume that just because I'm African American, that I'm going to be for welfare, or I'm going to be for public assistance. And it just felt really good to let people know that, how I felt about that situation.
>
> like, I think in a lot of ways that public assistance hinders African Americans, and it keeps them at a disadvantage. Because it doesn't fully let them know their full capabilities, so they're able to go out there and perform, and be successful. So, and I think in many ways it cheats them; it's like that, you know, that imprisonment that keeps them from being able to strive for success. Because a lot of times, if a person is going to be able to get X amount of money a month and not have to do anything for it, they're going to accept it. And so that's what's keeping them at a disadvantage.
>
> And me being able to, you know, voice how I feel about that to other people, and I explained that there are going to be certain circumstances where public assistance is needed, but just to be able to let people know that I'm not for, necessarily for that, it made me feel good to let them know that I'm not a technicality, that I don't want to be seen as a person who, you know, accepts handouts. I want to work for what I get, and that shocked them; I think that shocked a lot of people.
>
> Deanna: How did they respond to you when you said that?
>
> Rashid: It was silent; it was really quiet. …There wasn't any response to it. I think it got them off guard so much that they didn't know how to respond to it.

Rashid talked about how important it was for him to clarify his views about the government welfare system. This was important to him because there are a lot of stereotypes about Black people's attitudes and relationships to welfare. Rashid relished the opportunity to dispel those myths. The sense of satisfaction Rashid felt

in being able to voice his perspective seems to affirm the feminist pedagogical concept of "giving voice." The difference is that the classroom plays a simultaneous role as the site in which Rashid recognized the racial myths projected on him and the site in which he struggled against his own classmates rather than be supported by them. For Rashid, the classroom was not an automatic community nor was it a potential community to be struggled for. As a White-dominated space it often contained the very forces from which Rashid struggled to liberate himself. Giving voice was as much a sign of empowerment as it was an indication about the oppressive forces in the classroom.

Rashid shared another experience that he considered to be 'empowering':

Deanna: So any other times when you felt empowered or valued?

Rashid: Talking about in my Social Work class, talking about my experiences around drugs and alcohol. And I felt that, and I was able to let people know that a lot of times people who do take drugs are the ones who don't have knowledge about it. And since I had been around it my whole life, I was able to let them know that stuff like that [drugs] doesn't interest me, so their stereotype that all African Americans use drugs, or African Americans are alcoholics, or African Americans do this, I was able to, you know, shatter that stereotype.

A second way is talking about imprisonment, Black male imprisonment. African American imprisonment. And to be able to let people know that, you know, I don't have a record, I don't go out and commit crimes and stuff like that, that felt really good because I was just breaking down all those stereotypes that are placed upon African Americans. And to be able to say, "You know what, I don't fit into that high Black male incarceration rate, and I know people who don't fit into that rate either." And that was very empowering.

It was empowering for Rashid to dispel the negative images of African Americans and in the process to reassert an alternative, positive image of Blacks. This is in line with Black Feminist theorists' discussion of the importance of Black women and

members of marginalized groups to create a self-defined standpoint. Rashid's purpose here was not only to educate his peers or prove his knowledge, practice expressing his views, or build coalitions across race. His fundamental aim was to present a humanized image of himself and African Americans in general.

"Because I'm Choosing to Do It Myself, I Find the Power In It": John

Similar to Rashid, John also considered it empowering when he was able to openly claim his identity as a "mixed race Asian American boy chick" in class. He found a sense of personal power in being able to speak from the perspective of the different margins from which he lived his life (e.g., race, gender, sexuality). Additionally, he gained a sense of empowerment by telling classmates and the professor when he found their remarks ill informed and offensive. When offered three different terms to use, John chose 'empowerment' and then proceeded to recall those specific experiences that fit his notion.

> Deanna: Have there been times in your classes where you felt like *empowered* or *affirmed* or *valued*?
>
> John: … there are many times that I'm empowered in courses, in classes. Just, I think that any time I'm able to claim my identity and be proud of it, there's nothing more powerful to me than that.
>
> Or to stand up when people are saying things that, you know, are just wrong; no matter how we look at it, it's wrong. And sure, okay, academic freedom and freedom of speech, you say what you think, but you need to realize what you're thinking is wrong. There's no two ways about it. And so just standing up in those situations, I feel very self-empowered.

John stated that he felt empowered when he confronted classmates and professors about their racist, oppressive comments. Again, the reason for giving voice was not

to find his voice or to practice expressing it. For John the aim in speaking out was to defend himself against negative claims against his identity and intervene on his own behalf. In that way, John thought that he was granting himself power to act on his own behalf – rather than to act upon society or to participate in a democracy. Many participants' experiences indicated that there was no democracy in the classroom or outside of it necessarily for them to participate in.

Finding that other students of color wanted to be allies in the classroom was empowering for John. He explained what it meant to him:

> To find those allies in my classes, to realize that, to recognize that there are those people that have those same experiences, and that when we stand up for one another and when we share experiences, you know, hearing another person of color's experience as they share, a lot of times just hearing them speak, being able to use their voice in that space is empowering to me, and to all of us.

John found that when allies talk about their similar experiences it confirmed a particular, shared reality for students of color. It was empowering to know that they were not alone and they were not crazy.

Also, it was empowering to John not only when students disclosed their stories but when they expressed their desire to take a stand against racism:

> Or I, you know, I've had conversations where it's very empowering to hear someone else's similar experiences of speaking out. Just, you know, something that we can identify with. Even if it's in a hostile environment, or even if it's not. … And just hearing other people's experiences and knowing that yeah, this stuff happened, and yeah, it sucks…But to know that that needs to be changed, that there's other people working for it, that there's other people experiencing those same things that you do, that you know, that are willing to speak out and be like, "No, we're not going to take it." That's very empowering for me to hear other people share those experiences sometimes.

John was talking about the power of connecting with people who were like-minded, people who had similar experiences and who wanted to fight against racism.

Feminist pedagogy attempts to bridge across differences and critical pedagogy and critical multiculturalism sets out to prepare students to take action as individuals not necessarily prepare them for the unique challenge of coalition work. Based on my findings, students who are racially marginalized may be seeking out empowerment by connecting with classmates and professors who hold the same views as them.

John made it clear that sometimes self-disclosures were not empowering at all. He explained the distinction:

> I mean, because I've experienced times where I've either shared from a place of pain, where other people have shared from a place of pain, things that really, we're not done working through; these are issues that are still very raw to us, and then, you know, to be asked to share that or even to share it for whatever reason. A lot of times you can recognize the pain that's coming from that experience. And it's not the pain that has led to the empowerment yet.
>
> And so, you know, it's still on that journey towards being something that, yeah, I've worked through it and I find my power in it.

John explained why overall he felt empowered. This was a kind of empowerment that could not necessarily be learned through academic texts or acquired from authority given to the student by the instructor:

> But in general, I think, especially here at the University I've been very empowered in just everything. Because like I said, I've gotten to that point where I'm willing to call you on it, I don't care what you're going to think of me afterwards, I don't care what the other people in this classroom are going to think of me afterwards, you know, I'm going to care about when I look at myself in the mirror, you know, did I just kind of passively stand by as something happened.
>
> And so I'm at that point where really, most experiences for me are empowering. You know, it can be something that could cause pain potentially or different things, but because I'm choosing to do it myself, I find the power in it.

Overall, John's testimony expressed his view that it was important for students of color and from other marginalized groups to be able to speak out in class and to tell

stories about their experience from their standpoint as a member of a marginalized group. For John this was not only an exercise in giving voice or practicing democratic participation, it was a matter of affirming one another's experience, locating potential allies, and holding professors and students accountable for their racist remarks.

"I Don't Feel Rejuvenated or Anything": Catalina

Catalina also decided to forgo use of the term empowerment. Instead she talked about feeling "energetic" in times when she was able to leverage the privilege and status of being in an Honors-level class to gain credibility for her activist scholarship on immigration issues. This was a unique reframing because her experiences took place largely outside of the classroom while mobilizing the cultural capital of being an honor student at the university. When going to present her work on immigration to legislators, Catalina was energized by the fact that they took her seriously. She explained in more detail:

Deanna: …earlier in our talk I was asking you if you have ever felt empowered, and I'm not sure I've heard yet if you…

Catalina: If I ever felt empowered…

Deanna: And maybe that word doesn't feel right; if it doesn't, drop it. Do you ever feel like…

Catalina: I feel… I don't feel rejuvenated or anything. I feel energetic when I'm presenting this guide to legislators, and I can be like, because the fact that the Honors Think Tank is on there, and it's an Honors program, it gives it credibility, whereas if me and some of the other students of color put together this guide, it wouldn't get the same credibility or press or anything. So I love going and meeting with them [legislators], they're all, "Great," and they give me their card and they say, "Let's talk about this," and I'm really excited.

> So, like, I met with the person who's in charge of the state for Bill Richardson, and he's like, "You know, maybe Bill Richardson can meet you," and I'm like, "That's so cool." So Bill Richardson is coming and I want to wrangle a meeting with him. I don't know if that's actually possible, but, I mean, there's so many cool things.

Catalina noticed that her enrollment and participation in Honors classes gave her "credibility" and elevated her status and privilege when talking to legislators about her project on Immigration. By her own explanation this was not an empowered position but definitely a privileged one that gave her credibility with legislators. This was energizing for her because it allowed her to promote her project.

Catalina then pointed out that these moments when she felt energized to work on a cause and her work was received by people in power, took place outside of the classroom:

> Catalina: But a lot of that is really extracurricular things. Where in a lot of my classes, sometimes, in my Honors class for immigration I felt really energized, I'm like, "Let's get this done." One time four of us pulled an all-nighter and we edited the entire book, and then the next day we went for breakfast together and we were just so, you know, "We're done! This is great!" …but in my regular classes, that doesn't happen a lot.

Catalina felt energized when her political interests were aligned with the curriculum. She did not feel a sense of authority equal to that of the professor or that the classroom was a safe space or that she had critical thinking tools at her disposal. Her energy came from working collaboratively with classmates on a topic that meant a lot to her and had implications for a larger local, national and international community. The vigor of collaborative academic work is congruent with feminist pedagogy but Catalina did not equate it to empowerment in the way that feminist educators do. Catalina stated in her own words:

> I guess I view the U [University of Utah] as a stepping stone. I don't love the classes and I don't love the campus. Well, in a way I do; I grew up around the U and my dad came here and stuff, and so I have that sort of patriotic non-logical love for the U. But, I don't know, I don't like the dynamics, I don't like the situations that I encounter at the U, and so I view this as, you know, get in here, go to class, get my degree, get out, and then go somewhere and work and do something meaningful after the U. Like, I don't know, I do meaningful work while I'm here at the U, but I don't do it at the U. Like, I'll do things at the Capitol or in the community, but I don't think I'd ever work here at the U unless it's working with students of color. So, I don't know.

Catalina explained that the experiences she had outside of class were the most meaningful ones. They provided her with a sense of comradery, academic rigor, and the experience of making a contribution to the greater good of global society.

"I'm Not Having an Empowering Experience": Oscar

Oscar was a participant who indicated his understanding of the term empowerment and why I would use it. However, he also revised the term completely. In its place Oscar explained that he had found an academic path for himself. This path Oscar had chosen gave him a sense of purpose and helped him to locate professors who could support his research interests. He explained his perspective and offered an alternative term:

Deanna: Is there a word that describes what you're…

Oscar: I don't think so. If anything, I can see [the term] 'empowered', although I'm not having an empowering experience. But, oh, I don't know, kind of like now I have a reason to go to school, does that make sense? And to go along, I don't know, just because … looking back I was so lost, and now I'm found, I think I'm found. I've found who I am. I've found mentors. I've found what I want to study.

So that's what, I think, if that word works, 'found'. And I think it's even, I'm still finding stuff. It's not like, you know, everything's done and over with, but it's definitely been an incredible experience.

Oscar set aside the notion of empowerment altogether and began to discuss how he found his academic purpose and resources to support his goals. For him, gaining clarity about what he wanted to study and identifying mentors who would guide him along that path were the factors that led him to have what he called "an incredible experience." Even still, his newfound sense of purpose did not erase the encounters with racism and racial hostility in White-dominated classrooms. However, his sense of found-ness seemed to give him a reason and understanding of why he chose to endure such treatment.

Participants were different in terms of whether or not they experienced empowerment in their classes. Some found a sense of empowerment in mainstream courses yet others did not find it in places where they expected it to be such as in Ethnic Studies courses. Other students found their most powerful experiences outside of the classroom. In any case, each participant's experiences, observations and testimonies offered alternative definitions of what counted as empowering or powerful experiences. Here is a summary of the experiences that students considered to be empowering and powerful:

- Serving as a mentor to African American female high school students, and giving them practical advice and emotional support in navigating White-dominated spaces
- Dispelling racial stereotypes found in the media, the curriculum and students' views, and presenting a more complex, humanized image of African American men
- Talking back in class in order to claim one's identity, locate potential allies, and hold professors and classmate accountable for racist remarks
- Using the cultural capital of being a university-level honor student to gain credibility when lobbying for contentious political issues such as immigration and the Latino community

- Finding an educational sense of purpose, charting an academic path, and locating academic mentors.

These various definitions depart from the notions of empowerment posited by radical educational theorists. Scholar-practitioners in these fields have discussed empowerment for students as building a knowledge base about the historical struggles against oppression and for liberation; claiming an identity as a valid holder/producer of knowledge and agent of social change; and as the critical mastery of the academic curriculum and finding one's voice. Aspects of their notions can be found in students' own reframing but what is missing is a sense of how the overall context of a White-dominated classroom influenced what students of color determined to be empowering or powerful experiences. Black Feminist Standpoint Theory offers a definition of empowerment that is specific to White-dominated contexts and assists me in providing an interpretation of students' own reconceptualization.

Empowerment in Black Feminist Thought

Black Feminist Thought is a valuable framework for understanding students' testimonies because it offers a theory of oppression, resistance and empowerment within the context of White-dominated, male-centered society. It also offers a perspective from members of a marginalized group instead of *for them* or *on their behalf*. Empowerment in Black Feminist Thought also has the capacity to embrace the differing views and experiences held by students in noting that "each individual must find her own way, recognizing that her personal biography, while unique, is never as unique as she thinks" (Collins 2000, 308). This is an acknowledgement that

there is no essential identity for Black women, but that Black women frequently have in common certain experiences and barriers they have faced as being marginalized by White mainstream society. This can lead to both similar and distinctly different strategies for coping and identity development even though the barriers of race, class, gender, and sexuality often remain constant. The circumstance that students of color in this study hold in common is that they are all attempting to claim an education for themselves in White-dominated classrooms at the University of Utah. Although they may have different fields of study, professors, and so on, participants had all been actively engaged in trying to make sense of the racialized roles they were pressed into playing, figuring out how to navigate their way out of those roles, and seeking out experiences that were empowering or powerful.

Empowerment in Black Feminist Thought is multifaceted because it calls for a synthesis of personal empowerment and social transformation. The two are interdependent and dialectical in reinforcing the idea that knowledge is important for developing a self-defined, affirming notion of one self. At the same time, changing the consciousness of individual Black women cultivates the conditions for mobilizing forces to transform the material and social conditions in which one exists.

The main reason why I used Black Feminist Thought to understand students' testimonies about empowerment and powerful experiences in class was that it is a framework conceptualized by taking into serious consideration the marginalized standpoint of Black women and other groups within a White-dominated, male-centered society. This generated some important parallels between what counts as empowerment in Black Feminist Thought and what participants in my study

described as powerful experiences in White-dominated college classrooms. Some of those parallels were *the power and significance of relationships*, *talking back*, and *cultivating self-defined standpoints in classrooms and in academia*.

The Power and Significance of Relationships

In Black Feminist Thought, Black women's relationships with one another are important because they form a space free from the surveillance and domination of White patriarchal society. In familial connections, friendships and other variations, Black women offer one another a space in which to nurture a positive sense of self and reaffirm one another's humanity through both serious talk and humor. While it is important to note that relationships of any kind tend to be fraught with tensions, conflicts and other politics, many Black women have throughout history (both formally as is the case of Black sororities and informally) forged strong bonds with one another. One of the strengths undergirding these bonds is that they have a shared sense of what it takes to survive in a White patriarchal society. Patricia Hill Collins describes how as a student she had a spontaneous encounter with an older Black woman who encouraged her to pursue doctoral studies. Collins wrote:

> In 1978 I offered a seminar as part of a national summer institute for teachers and other school personnel. After my Chicago workshop, an older Black woman participant whispered to me, "honey, I'm real proud of you. Some folks don't want to see you up there [in front of the classroom], but you belong there. Go back to school and get your Ph.D., and then they won't be able to tell you nothing!" To this day, I thank her and try to do the same for others. In talking with other African-American women, I have discovered that many of us have had similar experiences. (2000, 113-114)

Today, Patricia Hill Collins is widely recognized as one of the most influential social theorists having made significant contributions to bridging the gaps between scholarship, research and activism, and theorizing the intersectionality of race, class, gender and sexuality. Collins' work could have been lost had it not been for the powerful and perhaps, empowering exchange between these two Black women. Whether in spontaneous conversation with strangers or through formal established venues, Black women's relationships can be a site in which they "affirm one another's humanity, specialness, and right to exist"(Collins 2000, 113).

In my study, participants' notion of empowerment often held within it a sense that relationships were important. Relationships with classmates and the professor or across race did not necessarily hold the most import as has been the focus in radical educational theories. For example, Zion came to the conclusion based on having acquired a knowledge base of critical revisionist history that the relationship she had with Black high school girls and her interactions with role models were the more powerful than what she had been experiencing or learning in the classroom. As a mentor, Zion offered Black high school girls practical advice on maneuvering institutional barriers and gave them emotional support for developing an affirmative identity.

Other students in my study made reference to the significance of forming relationships as part of their most powerful educational experiences. Catalina was "energized" after working all night with classmates to create a document laying out the issues of Latino immigration to present to legislators. Although the work itself was grueling and the topic was a highly contentious one, Catalina appreciated the

comradery of working on the project with classmates through the night that affirmed the value and importance of their efforts. In a larger academic context, Oscar indicated that finding faculty to support his course of study was a part of his powerful experience of "finding" his sense of purpose. In the classroom, John confronts racist remarks and speaks from his own experience in part, as a way to locate potential allies, who had similar experiences and viewpoints as him.

For several participants in my study, building relationships as mentors, with comrades, supportive faculty, and potential allies were integral to those experiences they described as powerful and empowering.

'Talking Back'

In Black Feminist Thought, "talking back" required that Black women take on an empowered position by speaking the truth from their perspective in relationships and situations where they were in fact subordinate. This is different from 'giving voice' that pivots n the notion that women have not had the same opportunity as men to develop their intellectual life nor access to a public forum in which to express their views. Giving voice is an encouragement for women to step out of silence and invisibility to articulate their perspectives. Talking back also recognizes the importance of Black women and members of marginalized groups expressing their views, and yet is more direct about how the barriers of race, class, gender, and sexuality make this project a risky one. Not only does talking back reference the courage one must have to see themselves as equal to an authority figure, but she must also live with the consequences of her actions should there be a

backlash for speaking out. hooks elaborates on this difference between White feminism and Black feminism:

> Within feminist circles, silence is often seen as the sexist "right speech of womanhood" – the sign of woman's submission to patriarchal authority. This emphasis on woman's silence may be an accurate remembering of what has taken place in the households of women from WASP backgrounds in the United States, but in Black communities (and diverse ethnic communities), women have not been silent. Their voices can be heard. Certainly for Black women, our struggle has not been to emerge from silence into speech but to change the nature and direction of our speech, to make a speech that compels listens, one that is heard. (1989, 6)

Within the paradigm of Black Feminist Thought, talking back was not simply a matter of gaining free, open expression. It was a method of questioning authority. As hooks stated:

> For us, true speaking is not solely an expression of creative power; it is an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges politics of domination that would render us nameless and voiceless. As such, it is a courageous act – as such, it represents a threat. To those who wield oppressive power, that which is threatening must necessarily be wiped out, annihilated, silenced. (1989, 8)

Talking back was one of the ways that participants in my study acted within the realm of personal empowerment. Despite their racialized and subordinated positions within White dominated classrooms, these students of color took on the risk of speaking from the truth of their lived experiences as racial ethnic minorities. They spoke out against the racial dynamics they experiences in class. Also, they openly and directly addressed political issues that were a major site of contention and contestation within mainstream society.

John found it empowering to claim his identity fully as an Asian American mixed race boychick and to speak about his own experiences. This was important because he did not have to deny certain parts of his identity in order to participate in class. Nor did he have to silence himself, be ashamed of his identity, or succumb to

the fear that his classmates or the professor would condemn him. This was risky for John because his identity was markedly different and even disconcerting to students who adhered to mainstream values of Eurocentrism, patriarchy, and heterosexism. By talking about his identity, John was also talking back to those with greater power and influence who would prefer he remain silent and invisible. By talking back John automatically took an oppositional stance in class but an affirmative one towards himself.

John also talked back by holding professors and classmates accountable for their racist remarks. John respected the edict of academic freedom. At the same time he found racist and hate speech "wrong." Although college classrooms presumably grant freedom of speech to all students, John recognized that as a student from multiple marginalized and subordinated groups, his perspective was out-numbered and out-powered. This position made him vulnerable to an array of academic and social consequences. The potential consequences were magnified when John confronted professors who said they were sorry about the hostile racial dynamics in class, but did not intervene when John was getting attacked. In these cases, when John talked back it was not only to challenge ideas and mainstream values but also to confront professors and classmates on their actions that reproduced racism in the classroom. John went beyond voicing his opinion and was "daring to disagree" (hooks 1989, 5).

In Catalina's case, talking back meant speaking from an unpopular, contentious position about global political issues. Additionally, Catalina shared her views with legislators. Catalina devoted a significant amount of time and energy

producing a booklet of resources that addressed issues related to Latina/o immigration. Taking on this project in her class was a risk because early on one of her professors had made a comment that "Peruvian students were taking over." His comment indicated that he held ignorant and possibly racist views towards both Latinos as a group and the issue of immigration. Catalina's booklet that she created with classmates took a pro immigration stance. Furthermore, Catalina presented the booklet to legislators in Utah who had publicly declared their refusal to support legislation such as the Dream Act that would make provisions for children of immigrants to attend college. Rather than remain silent or stay in her "proper place" as a Latina college student, Catalina talked back by speaking as an equal to an authority figure and "raising issues that were not deemed appropriate [or polite] subjects" (hooks 1989, 7).

Part of the profundity of talking back is that it is an assertion of subjectivity by one who is considered an "objectified other." By speaking from an oppositional standpoint about their life experiences, confronting professors about their hypocritical ways and challenging legislators to rethink their political views, participants are drawing attention to the real impact of racial and other forms of oppression on individuals and groups. Bell hooks offers another insight based on the politics of speech for Black women. She wrote:

> Often when Black subjects give expression to multiple aspects of identity, which emerge from a different location, we may be seen by White others as "spectacle"…Yet their mode of seeing cannot be the factor which determines style of representation or the content of one's work. Fundamental to the process of decentering the oppressive other and claiming our right to subjectivity is the insistence that we must determine how we will be and not rely on colonizing responses to determine our legitimacy. We are not looking to that Other for recognition. We are recognizing ourselves and willingly

> making contact with all who would engage us in a constructive manner. (hooks 1990b, 22)

For participants in my study, talking back was their method for contact and constructive engagement. Also crucial to this method was having a self-defined standpoint from which to speak.

Cultivating Self-Defined Standpoints in Classroom and in Academia

Black Feminist Thought encourages Black women to develop a positive self-image to counteract the damaging effects of the degrading views about Black women projected by mainstream society. Black Feminist Thought is not only concerned with the material conditions that affect Black women but also considers how knowledge and consciousness influence social conditions. Socialization and education in a White patriarchal society have been precarious for Black women throughout history because of the predominance of derogatory images and roles assigned to them (e.g., Mammy, Aunt Jemima, Sapphire, the Tragic Mulatto). It is widely assumed that schools transmit objective knowledge to students but in fact the mainstream curriculum tends to be White- and male-centered, especially at predominantly White colleges and universities. This means that the contributions of Black women to society, culture and the U.S. intellectual tradition are frequently omitted, downplayed or devalued. Therefore, education as a means by which to develop oneself as an intellectual and a social being has been a potentially dangerous proposition for Black women. In some cases, Black women have been warned against adopting White mainstream cultural values. This is treated as a fool's position to take because White mainstream society devalues Black women and to

assimilate to it is to risk subjecting oneself to oppression and internalized racism. This is also a warning issued to Black men and other marginalized groups. In his autobiography, President Barack Obama received a cautionary word from an older Black male mentor who referred to college as "an advanced degree of compromise." Obama's mentor, Frank, explains his statement:

> Understand something, boy. You're not going to college to get educated. You're going there to get *trained*. They'll train you to want what you don't need. They'll train you to forget what it is that you already know. They'll train you so good, you'll start believing what they tell you about equal opportunity and the American way and all that shit. They'll give you a corner office and invite you to fancy dinners, and tell you you're a credit to your race. Until you want to actually start running things, and then they'll yank on your chain and let you know that you may be a well-trained, well-paid nigger, but you're a nigger just the same. (Obama 2004, 97)

In response to this warning, Obama grows increasingly determined to examine and understand and define his racial identity on his own terms – a project engaged in by many Black women and members of marginalized groups as well. Within the rubric of Black Feminist Thought, cultivating a self-defined standpoint is as important to survival as securing employment, housing and health care. Patricia Hill Collins wrote:

> When members of excluded groups like African-American women are actively involved in defining African American women's standpoints on our own terms, we become empowered. … Without the foundation of self-definition, subordinated groups continue to view their experiences through the framework of the dominant group. "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house," contends Audre Lorde. "They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. (1991, 373)

For students of color in my study, cultivating a self-defined standpoint assisted them greatly in gaining the leverage necessary for them to decide what roles they wanted

to play in college classrooms and carve out their own educational, activist course in academia.

In the classroom, Rashid developed a self-defined standpoint by working to disprove racial stereotypes about African American males. He did this by explaining to the professor and classmates how his views and life experiences are markedly different from the predominant, negative images of Black males as uneducated, incarcerated thugs. Dispelling these racial myths is empowering for Rashid because it allows him to decenter dominant views and reconstruct a view of Black males that is affirmative and more aligned with his view of himself. As Collins writes:

> Defining and valuing one's consciousness of one's own self-defined standpoint in the face of images that foster a self-definition as the objectified "other" is an important way of resisting the dehumanization essential to systems of domination. (1986, 18)

Rashid's sense of empowerment evolved as he was able to use his own self-defined standpoint as a platform from which to present a more humanized image of himself and Black males.

Beyond the classroom and in the larger context of academia, Oscar had a powerful experience when he found an educational sense of purpose for himself. In this case, Oscar applied to participate in the Undergraduate Studies Program in which he was able to design his own major. Thus, Oscar was able to select classes and professors that addressed his own research interests in Gender Studies, Ethnic Studies and Social Justice. Oscar was careful to point out that although he had chosen his classes it did not automatically mean that he could avoid hostile racial dynamics. However, Oscar was fuelled on by his own self-defined intellectual interests and course of study.

Catalina cultivated a self-defined standpoint that allowed her to leverage the cultural capital of being in Honors classes towards powerful experiences outside of the classroom. For example, Catalina and several classmates worked on a booklet of educational resources on the topic of Latino immigration. While the classroom itself was not a safe space despite Catalina's attempts to make it so, she had powerful experiences working with classmates outside of the classroom and in presenting their finished work to legislators in the capitol building. Catalina finally determined that she is "energized" by relationships, interactions and a sense of purpose that exists *outside* of the university. Catalina's self-defined standpoint within the college classroom and in academia is that her most meaningful work takes place outside of the university.

Cultivating self-defined standpoints was an important aspect of participants' feeling empowered and having powerful experiences. They assisted participants in repelling racial stereotypes and in rejecting racialized roles projected onto them in White-dominated classrooms. As Collins stated:

> When Black women define themselves, they clearly reject the taken-for-granted assumption that those in positions granting them the authority to describe and analyze reality are entitled to do so. Regardless of the actual content of Black women's self-definitions, the act of insisting on Black female self-definition validates Black women's power as human subjects. (1986, 17)

Similarly, participants who formed their own definitions of themselves as members of racial ethnic minority groups, as intellectuals, as students and as activists were better equipped to have the kinds of experiences they considered to be empowering and powerful.

CHAPTER 7

THEORETICAL ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION

My study of the racial dynamics that students of color experienced in predominantly White classrooms was designed to understand not only what participants experienced but also how they interpreted their experiences. This research has resulted in three major themes that I have discussed throughout this dissertation regarding the racialized roles that emerged in the classroom, the concept of the classroom as a safe space, and a reexamination of empowerment for students of color. These themes were generated from the data I gathered through individual interviews with students and dealt more with their experiences of White-dominated classrooms than it did with any other aspect such as identity, the disaggregation of students experience based on racial identity, or other possible units of analysis. Throughout this dissertation I have interspersed my own interpretations of how participants' testimonies challenged and extended the relevant literature. In this concluding chapter, I provide additional analysis of my findings and how I see certain core themes and issues linked with larger areas of research and educational change.

In the first section of this chapter, I discuss how the data urge us to expand our thinking about how students of color experience racial subjugation in White-dominated college classrooms, whether or not safety is a viable possibility for them,

and a reexamination of empowerment. The second section of this chapter enters into a dialogue with the work of one of the leading educational scholars Signithia Fordham. Her construct "acting White" speaks to my study that also considers the racial strategies of resistance employed by students of color. Finally, I explore the educational changes suggested by my data.

Understanding the Experiences of Students of Color in White-Dominated College Classrooms

The literature that discusses the experiences of students of color in White-dominated classrooms reminds us that racism continually threatens to undermine the promises and privileges of a college education. Increasingly scholars have gone beyond documenting racial offenses to reexamine the construct of race itself. The development of a multifaceted notion of racism helps researchers to uncover areas in desperate need of change that may not have been clear to us otherwise. I have relied on many of these studies to provide insight into the complex ways that race showed up and got played out in college classrooms at the University of Utah. This may seem odd in light of the fact that some of these texts aim to debunk one another. However, through research and writing I have found that multiple definitions of race can coexist and that the points at which they oppose one another often manifest as racial dilemmas that individuals and institutions face in everyday life.

For this study I have employed Black Feminist Standpoint Theory because it is broad and flexible enough to theorize multiple notions of race, identity, oppression and empowerment under one rubric. Although the theory itself was specifically

based on the lived experiences of African American women, the resulting framework and constructs are applicable for oppressed groups in general because of our similar location, that is one of marginalization in a White-dominated male-centered class conscious society. In my study, Black Feminist Standpoint Theory helped me to make links between the testimonies of students from diverse racial ethnic minority backgrounds without negating their differences in terms of race, nationality, gender, sexuality, and class.

What I discovered through the research process was that despite the differences among participants, there were certain issues and experiences that overlapped with one another and that those experiences were race-based. During interviews, I was surprised that participants unanimously declared race as having the greatest impact on their experiences in college classrooms. They shared this information with me through a series of pointed questions on my part (see Interview Protocol). I was careful to use several open-ended questions to ask about identity and what they saw as the greatest factor impacting their classroom experiences because I did not want to impose my assumptions on participants. I did not want the interview to reproduce the racialized positioning that was happening to them in their classrooms. Interestingly, participants claimed rather complex identities that included specific and detailed racial, ethnic, gendered, sexual categorizations and yet they also singled out 'race' as the unit of analysis that framed their experiences in the most oppressive ways. From this declaration I tried to understand what kinds of racialized experiences they were having and what specific problems and possibilities were created as a result. Eventually, I identified three major themes that addressed

the concerns of all participants. Those were the issues of racialized roles, the quest for 'safety' in a White-dominated classroom and the viability of empowerment.

From Racialized Roles to Self-Defined Standpoints

Students of color wanted to create their own self-defined standpoints in college classrooms. Participants indicated that White-dominated classrooms were organized by racialized roles that students and professors were expected to play. For students of color these roles were often limited and carried with them negative connotations. The three major roles that students of color were pressed into playing were that of the *cultural spokesperson*, the *interventionist*, and the *angry minority*. The cultural spokesperson offered participants the unusual opportunity of providing information about their own or others' racial ethnic group. However, it carried with it the burden of educating their classmates and the professor on demand. The responsibility to educate the class pushed participants to the margins of their own educational process. Other times it put them in the line of fire because race-related issues were often contentious and controversial. Similarly, the role of interventionist placed students of color in the center of conflict when they attempted to insert more contextualized information about people of color into class discussion. The angry minority marked a point of no return in which students were labeled a problem for positing critical race perspectives that exposed the limitations in the curriculum and in dominant modes of thinking and speaking about race.

At times, participants stepped into these roles and made the most of them. However, the pain, frustration and stress that typically accompanied these racialized

roles indicated to me that participants longed to establish for themselves what role they would play in class. This desire to create their own self-defined standpoints increased as they embarked on independent research to learn about the historical, political struggles of their respective racial ethnic groups. They had begun to discover that their racial identity did not limit them to the three roles imposed on them in college classrooms. Participants were in the process of forming a racialized, politicized identity that also embraced other aspects of their gender, nationality, sexuality and class, and offered examples of how to be agents of social change. Understanding their identity in complex terms illuminated for participants grounds for which they could develop friendships across racial lines that would assist them in the academic process, and develop solidarities across racial lines to mobilize around social justice and diversity issues on campus. Acquiescing to the three roles presented to them in White-dominated classrooms would have left them exploited, stigmatized, and marginalized from the overall educational process.

Safety Is a Classroom Free of Racism

Racism has been known to alienate college students of color from the academic process and otherwise create serious personal and social damage for students during what are some often one of the most influential, formative years of their lives. A university's protocol for responding to the dangers of racism is obviously less developed than are campus responses to physical danger. Part of the lack of protocol is that racism cannot be reduced to an isolated incident like a shooting on campus can. Racism is actually the status quo state of affairs in schools

and society. In any given context, we do not really know what to do about it. How do we keep each other safe from racism when it is pervasive, present in numerous and sometimes subtle forms, and its existence remains widely disputed? The rhetoric of 'the classroom as a safe space' is an attempt to recognize that in educational spaces there really are nonphysical factors that can damage individuals and obstruct the educational process.

For the most part the notion of safety has been sanitized from any association with race-related issues. The mantra was employed by educators who saw racism as a problem of the past remedied by the civil rights movement. Otherwise they view it as a non-issue for them personally because they were colorblind or had already achieved antiracism. Such educators are likely to miss the invisible signs of what participants in my study pointed to as the most difficult barrier they faced in White-dominated college classrooms – race. Pamela Perry made clear that the key to creating safe spaces for students of color lies in teachers recognizing the extent to which their own classrooms are racially dangerous. She wrote:

> …the importance of White teachers being open to considering how classroom interactions that feel ordinary and harmless to them can be experienced by students of color as exclusionary and ostracizing. Even the most committed antiracist educators can unwittingly provoke such responses. (2008, 227)

Although my study points clearly to certain behaviors and scenarios that are racially hostile, educators will also have to look to the unseen for signs of danger. They would have to notice who is absent from class, who is silent, and who dropped out of the class altogether.

In this study, participants treated 'safety' and 'race' as inalienable from one another. Their reflections on this issue ranged from long narrations of their attempts

to achieve safety in the classroom for themselves and other students to skepticism as to whether or not safety was possible in an institution where they were out-numbered and out-powered. Participants in my study developed strategies that helped them assess the source and level of racial danger in the classroom. From there they consciously developed strategies for protecting themselves while forwarding their academic goals. There were also cases in which students dropped a class or changed their major in an attempt to get away from the racial subjugation they experienced. However, participants in this study found ways to persevere in their studies. In fact they frequently took on more responsibility for their education. Many times they took a route that was much more challenging and rigorous academically. For example Oscar opted to create his own bachelor's degree through the Undergraduate Studies Program. Jarihd studied social justice and diversity issues during his spare time between being a full-time student and full-time employment at the university. Catalina took her academic interests outside the classroom to lobby for legislation that would prevent the disenfranchisement of immigrant families and children. Ironically, for participants in my study safety often required them to take major risks both socially and academically.

Redefining Empowerment

Empowerment in educational contexts is often conceptualized in "either or" terms. Either the focus is on assisting students to personally develop a critical awareness or it is geared towards cultivating them into becoming agents of social change. In both cases, radical educators often focus their efforts on building a curriculum and a pedagogy that facilitates these goals. One example of this is when radical educators incorporate course texts that demystify mainstream ideologies and present revisionist versions of U.S. social history. The idea is that students need a certain kind of knowledge, critical knowledge, and that once it is acquired they will be primed for participation in social change movements. Scholar-practitioners in the field of critical multiculturalism, critical pedagogy, and feminist pedagogy have been quite ingenious with respect to redesigning the curriculum to promote subjugated knowledge. In many cases students will find the classroom to be a place where they are exposed to new and alternative sets of knowledge. One of the key insights gleaned from my study is that participants were not just longing for a curriculum that was critical or more interactive teaching styles. They were hoping for and seeking out a classroom experience that affirmed their presence, identity, and knowledge as members of racially subjugated groups.

I make the case that radical educators must pay closer attention to the *quality of experience* that students have in their classes, especially students from racial ethnic minority groups. There is a dominant assumption in education, one that is very hard to resist, that knowledge is power. Participants in my study helped me to understand that knowledge is a vital component in the experiences they had that were considered powerful. However, the context in which that information was learned

and received had perhaps a greater impact on participants' level of interest, engagement, and sense of empowerment. White-dominated college classrooms were often contexts in which participants managed to get the academic knowledge they needed to get good grades, but that was not necessarily the key to their empowerment. Participants' testimonies suggested that educators must examine the racial dynamics in their own classrooms and consider how they were organized in ways that maintained the privilege and entitlement of White mainstream students and perpetuated the disempowerment of racial ethnic minority students.

For participants in my study, empowerment was not an either or proposition. In fact, it often was not an option for them at all. They understood that empowerment was typically defined in terms of personal empowerment and social change. However, they indicated that because of the constant state of affairs in White-dominated classrooms, empowerment was not a real possibility for them, at least not in the ways it had been defined by scholars. In revising empowerment they described specific kinds of encounters with key people. For example Zion talked about how powerful it was for her to mentor a Black female high school student and help her mentee develop strategies for building self-esteem in White-dominated spaces. Zion was adamant that empowerment was a misnomer especially in light of the pervasive struggles of Black women to gain respect and equity in society. Zion believed that oppression never ended - it simply changed forms. For her, working with Black female youth was a way to feel like she was having a positive impact on the life of someone who might one day face the same battles she was facing at the

university. It was the connection, the mentor-mentee relationship that served as the context for this powerful exchange.

'Talking back' was also an exchange but one that was much more contentious. Participants talked back by positing knowledge to classmates and the professor that challenged the intellectual authority of the professor and the dominance of White students. Such remarks made by participants were grounded in their lived experiences as members of racial ethnic minority groups in a White-dominated society and university. Statements they made often challenged the assumptions held by mainstream society that bolstered the course curriculum. One example was when Arianna disputed the premise of the assignment to humanize a member of an "othered group." Arianna openly expressed that the assignment was problematic for her and clearly was formulated with White mainstream students in mind. Arianna was not just voicing her opinion about the assignment. She was also asserting her own authority, a privilege that was not extended to her as a student or as a Chicana in a White-dominated classroom. Talking back put Arianna in a risky position but it also represented a case in which a participant granted herself power rather than relying on a professor to do it. This case was similar to the findings of Demerath, Lynch, and Davidson (2008) in which they conducted a four year ethnographic study of students in a suburban U.S. high school. These researchers tried to account for the psychological capital that students did and did not acquire in the schooling context. Approximately seventy-five percent of students considered themselves to be a "confident student." When asked where their confidence came from, many of them attributed it to themselves. The implication was that the school

was a barrier to confidence and that students had overcome that barrier by their own means.

Experiencing the power and significance of relationships and talking back were instrumental in assisting students in developing their own self-defined standpoints. In the White-dominated classroom participants often felt as though "the roles are already created in the class." Sometimes participants would receive warnings from other students of color about certain professors and how their personalities, curriculum, and teaching approaches created racially hostile learning environments. With ample warning participants were able to make decisions about whether or not to enroll the class, find alternatives that would fulfill the university requirement, or enlist peers to enroll in the class together for protection and solidarity. In less predictable cases, participants were savvy about assessing the degree of racial hostility in the classroom and its effect on them personally and on their racial positioning in class. If they could find a way to manage the effects they stayed in the class. Managing the effects ranged from the decision to remain silent and find a path of least resistance to asserting their identity and positionality on their own terms. It was important for students to create their own self-defined standpoints because the positionalities projected onto them from within White-dominated classrooms were often dehumanizing and marginalizing.

The Circle of Impact: Powerful Experiences

Participants indicated that empowerment was unlikely for them in White-dominated classrooms. Personal empowerment was far off because they doubted

that their critical race perspectives would ever be valued in class or that their learning would be given as much priority as White mainstream students. Social transformation inside the classroom seemed far off to them especially for those participants who had tried themselves to make the racial dynamics in class more amicable and liberatory. Participants shunned the term 'empowerment' and spoke instead about experiences that I refer to as 'powerful'. This is my attempt to reframe the concept of empowerment to be more aligned with the experiences of students of color in White-dominated classrooms. Powerful experiences are not dependent on anything the teacher can do for students, per se. They often occur in the context of important relationships such as comradery, collegiality, and mentorship. When participants talked back and created their own self-defined standpoints they experienced their own power in action. Powerful experiences were moments in which participants recognized that they were much more intelligent, capable, important, and influential than the dehumanized racial roles projected onto them.

Powerful experiences often compelled participants to embark on a journey of *personal change* in which they acquired more knowledge about their racial ethnic heritage, developed a critical consciousness about self, society, and academia, and found a sense of purpose. As described in Chapter 6, powerful experiences often led participants headlong into studies about the political histories of their respective racial ethnic groups. Also participants began in depth studies of racism, social justice and diversity. For example, Jarihd enrolled in a workshop on Unlearning Racism that helped attendees work through the emotional wounds caused by racism. This kind of self-directed education regarding the political history of racial ethnic

minorities and American racism contributed to participants developing a critical consciousness about race and other social justice issues. With a critical consciousness participants examined their own life experiences, social norms, academic culture in order to locate the ways in which mainstream ideologies reproduced inequality. They also used their critical consciousness to point to incongruencies between mainstream beliefs and marginalized perspectives where powerful experiences, personal change, and social transformation were possible.

Once participants had achieved a desired level of personal change, they often chose to participate in larger social movements on campus or in the community at large. This was an expression of their desire to effect *social transformation*. Social transformation was defined by the overarching aim to eradicate racism in any form from a national policy to interpersonal politics. For example, Catalina set out to transform the social relations in the classroom to eliminate racial hostility and provide students of color with an opportunity to become more engaged in the social and academic process. Also, Catalina took the project she had developed for class to develop materials to educate legislators on immigration policies. Her goal was to change the way legislators voted in hopes that they would vote to support children of immigrants who wanted to attend college. Part of her decision to extend the life and scope of her project came as a result of the powerful experience she had working on the project with colleagues. Participants who had begun to undergo significant personal change frequently chose to pursue projects that promoted social change within their cohort groups, for younger students and siblings, through campus-based organizations (e.g., MEChA, Black Student Union, Diversity Board), community-

based organizations, and through national and international initiatives. See Figure 6 for a visual map of the circle of impact.

The experiences and perspectives of participants in this study assist in re-defining empowerment from the standpoint of racial ethnic minority students in White-dominated college classrooms. Their testimonies suggest that past notions have been largely teacher-oriented or theoretically driven. When we take into consideration their insights as members of racially subjugated groups it allows us to see how participants drew from sources outside of and beyond the institutional

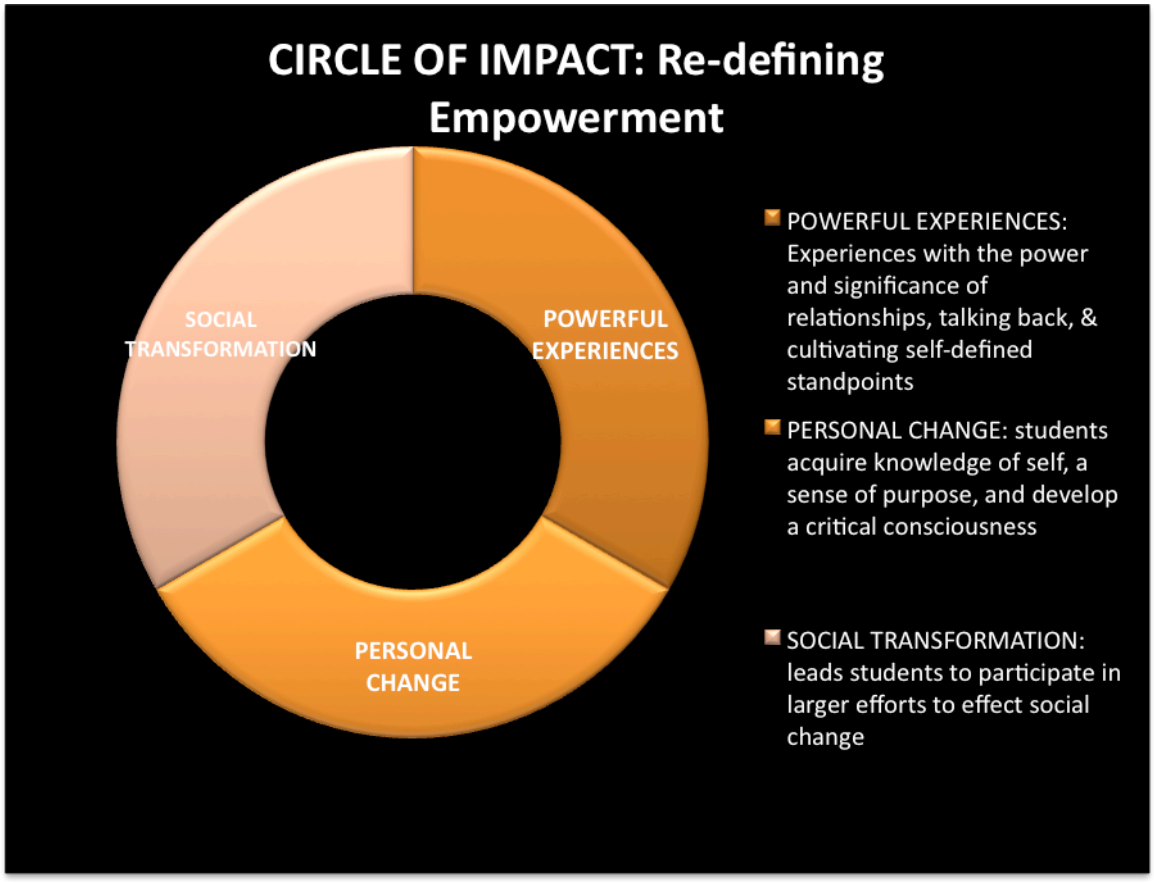

Figure 6. Circle of Impact: Redefining Empowerment

context in hopes of finding powerful experiences that would lead to personal change and social transformation.

Implications for Popular Educational Research

Sometimes the path of least resistance for students of color in White-dominated educational spaces is assimilation. Although sadly it can be the most painful path in which entrance into a community is ironically marked by isolation. African Americans who are accused of acting White are inevitably displaced, becoming conscripts in an army of one.

Since White mainstream members of society are the dominant group assimilation for students of color is often synonymous with 'acting White.' Acting White is a phenomenon originally codefied by Signithia Fordham (1996) as part of the findings of a multiyear ethnographic study she conducted of African American students at Capital High, a predominantly Black high school in Washington, D.C.. Fordham found that African American students defined "acting White" as engagement in any behaviors typically associated with White dominant society such as speaking standard English, going to museums, dancing offbeat, doing outdoor activities, and studying hard. When Black students at Capital high engaged in any of these activities they were seen as giving a racial performance of Whiteness. When Black students performed Whiteness in the school context for teachers they were often rewarded by not being labeled as a 'problem student' and instead identified as a 'good student'. Fordham's study demonstrated that even a predominantly Black school setting can be dominated by White cultural norms. To elaborate the point, Fordham (2008) described her own experience as a Black female student in

predominantly White schools in the beginning of the era of the school desegregation movement:

> Because our individual achievement was heavily dependent on how closely we resembled other academically successful students and our teachers, I learned to "act White" or perform Whiteness by hiding those aspects of me that did not fit: my dark skin, my rounded facial features, my arrogant hair, my Black accent. I sought to mimic these other practices as I saw them manifested by my White peers. In fact, my schooling compelled me to be "Blacked out" of my own life. (Fordham 1996, 232)

As Fordham explained, "acting White" as a racial performance assisted her, participants in her study, and countless other African American students in gaining acceptance into White-dominated educational spaces. The irony of acceptance was that Black students were required to shed any obvious, outward manifestations of their Black identity from appearance to behavior in order to purchase the price of admittance. Fordham argued that students of color who "act White" may benefit academically but they often absorb a damaging psychological cost as a result. Additionally, fulfilling White cultural norms did not always guarantee Black students social and academic rewards. The fear of no return on their racial performance was one of the main reasons why Black students simultaneously struggled to maintain citizenship in their Black communities.

One of the many critical assessments that Fordham made about Black students and the racial performance of Whiteness in schools is that as a resistance strategy students hoped it would yield them the same liberties as White students. Since Blackness often positioned them in ways that marginalized them from the academic process in schools and employment opportunities, fair housing, and quality health care in society, the racial performance of Whiteness seemed to hold the

possibility of an improved quality of life overall. Furthermore Whiteness carried with it a sense of entitlement so that individuals who are White are better situated to claim U.S. citizenship, live in any neighborhood they choose, and vote without any additional proof of citizenship or qualifications (Fordham 1996, 233). Furthermore they can partake in all of these benefits and more without deference to any other segment of society and without fear that these privileges will be contested or denied. Fordham elaborated on the intersection of Whiteness, Blackness and entitlement:

> In short, in the context of U.S. racism and stratification, "acting White" was an act of collective assertion, claiming as rights what has previously been reserved as privileges for Whites only. For African Americans, it means unconditionally embracing the institutions and practices that were treated as the prerogative of White Americans and declared off limits to enslaved Africans and their descendants. (1996, 234)

In a twisted way, "acting White" was a strategy of resistance in which students of color attempted to throw off the yoke of racial subjugation and claim the rights and privileges afforded to members of White mainstream society. It is twisted because the strategy itself entailed the sublimation, even an outright negation, of one's own racial identity.

Fordham, 'Acting White', and College Students of Color

Although Fordham's research site was a predominantly African American high school in Washington, D.C. and the context for my study was a White-dominated university in Salt Lake City, Utah, the phenomenon of Acting White has relevance for the participants in my study. Their reference to students of color who they saw as "invested in Whiteness" carried with it the critique that invested students were willing to negate their racial ethnic identity in order to increase their chances of

acceptance in a racially stratified educational setting. When one is invested in Whiteness they have a reason to carry out the racial performance of "acting White." In college classrooms, White cultural norms of behavior, knowledge, and academia governed expectations of engagement and the routes through which students could achieve academic success. According to participants in my study, when students of color bracketed out their racial ethnic identity, consciously or unconsciously, they were more able to avoid being positioned as the cultural spokesperson, the interventionist, and the angry minority. In fact, the assimilationist stance of students of color invested in Whiteness served to emphasize the critical race stance of my research participants even more. The juxtaposition between the two stances made participants look like "rebels without a cause" compared to their well-mannered counterparts. I cannot speak to the costs or benefits of acting White or being invested in Whiteness because that was not within the scope of this study.

Participants in my study described the positionality of being "invested in Whiteness" as one they understood even if they did not respect it. During interviews they did not spend time negatively judging students of color who employed this practice. Participants were more concerned with the fact that students who they thought would be allies were not available to them and figuring out alternative strategies for protecting themselves in racially-hostile classrooms. Their aim was to establish self-defined standpoints that did not require them to perform negative and dehumanizing racial stereotypes or to act White in order to participate in White-dominated classrooms and succeed academically.

The strategies and frameworks employed by participants in my study can be seen as a way for them to liberate themselves from the burden of acting White or acting according to racial ethnic minority stereotypes. Participants did not want to buy into the beliefs and practices that in order to gain a sense of belonging and to achieve academic success they would have to relinquish their identity, culture, and background as racial ethnic minorities. Many of the participants in my study strongly claimed their racial ethnic identity, embraced it with pride, and dedicated themselves to becoming more educated about their respective racial histories. They saw this reclamation of their identity as fundamental to the healing of past wounds, and for their survival and success at the university. Rather than assimilating themselves, participants were in effect calling for the curriculum to change to be more inclusive of racial ethnic minorities in more complex ways both intellectually and institutionally. Until such institutional change occurred, participants took total responsibility for their own extracurricular education and for the consequences of talking back (and remaining silent) from a racially subjugated position.

Participants in my study often accepted the consequences of expressing critical race views that were not aligned with White mainstream ideologies. In these cases they were clearly not acting White, nor were they acting Black. They were labeled as "the angry minority". This title indicated that they were stigmatized in a way that actually negated their specific racial identity as Chicana, mixed race, African Americans, rendering it as nondescript or unimportant. Thus, students of color who spoke their critical race views were placed into a deconstructed category of people who refused to "get over" racism and acknowledge the racial progress of

the U.S. Participants knew this was a dangerous position to be in both socially and academically. It was certainly a painful one. For example, Eva would have had to suppress her own intellectual inclinations to examine psychological issues outside of the individual orientation and within a collective and community-based context. For Arianna it may have meant that she would have had to silently accept assignments that ignored her identity and presence in the classroom. Yet they maintained their critical race stance and weathered the racial storms of isolation, rejection, dehumanization, and exclusion.

Participants in my study extend Fordham's paradigm by positing an alternative resistance strategy in White-dominated educational settings. They frequently expressed their identity as complex, multifaceted, and intersecting along racial, ethnic, gender and sexual lines even as they viewed race as having the greatest impact on their experiences in college classrooms and articulated their concerns mainly in a White versus color paradigm. In high school participants did not necessarily claim their racial ethnic identity. Some participants indicated that acting White was their main strategy for fitting in during their high school years. Zion ran track in high school and in her first year in college. She explained that her status as a student athlete allowed her to bypass many of the racial dilemmas and tensions that her classmates experienced. Zion said that it was not until she resigned from playing sports in her second year at the University of Utah that she began to have experiences with racism that mirrored those of her sister Makini and other Black students. Oscar felt little to no pressure to act White in high school because the student body was mostly comprised of racial ethnic minority students. Oscar talked

about his freshman year at the University of Utah as one of his first encounters in a predominantly White educational setting.

By juxtaposing my study with Fordham's we see an elaboration of strategies used by students who refused to accept the burden of acting White. Participants in my study were well aware that the path of least resistance both socially and academically in the college classroom was to take on, wholeheartedly, the roles projected on to them in White-dominated classrooms. Yet they often decided to stand alone or in their words be "singled out" while they called for the curriculum, the pedagogy, and the cultural norms of classroom participation and academic excellence to be transformed. They became agents of change in their own lives and among their peers without the conventions of the reigning radical educational theories, and despite the well-intended efforts of White professors. In most cases, these resources were not readily available to them. Also, their self-defined notions of 'safety' and 'empowerment' often existed outside of the bounds of good intentions and radical scholarship. In most cases, students had powerful experiences by following their own sense of purpose, intellectual interests, and their strong desire to be of service to others facing similar racial hardships.

Implications for Education

Throughout this dissertation I have focused on what students of color experienced in White-dominated college classrooms, the strategies they used to protect themselves from racial hostility, and their view on how powerful experiences gave them leverage over racial subjugation. Studying their knowledge from a

marginalized standpoint provides insight into the racial dangers that some students may be confronting in the classroom. This information adds to scholarly discussions by pointing to the ways in which both traditional and radical approaches to education contain elements that may not only be discriminatory towards students of color but also dehumanizing. In the remainder of this chapter I will discuss how participants' testimonies point to specific areas in which both traditional and radical educational approaches need to change. I posit that overall the suggestions lead towards the development of a racially humanizing pedagogy.

Suggestions for Change

In White-dominated college classrooms, students of color were often faced with an experience that was dehumanizing and disempowering. Aspects of their identity were often excised when professors and classmates positioned them racially. The Eurocentric orientation of course texts implicitly conveyed that knowledge from marginalized standpoints was invalid and unimportant. Sometimes White students questioned why students of color were in the classroom at all. Based on students' testimonies and my analysis, I offer some concrete suggestions for humanizing the curriculum and daily interactions in classrooms that can impact the quality of experience for students of color in White-dominated classrooms. I wish I could propose a plan for eradicating racism in all its forms from college classrooms, but what I posit here is much more humble than that. My aim is to increase the probability that the presence of students of color will be acknowledged and valued; that subjugated standpoints will be treated as legitimate and valuable intellectual

property and integrated into the curriculum and class discussion; and that educators will take responsibility for and be proactive in building a supportive and challenging academic environment for racial ethnic minority students. The following four suggestions are geared towards achieving these aims.

One of the first suggestions is for educators to steer away from texts and teaching strategies that rely on essentialized notions of racial identity. Participants engaged in strategic essentialism by focusing on a single aspect of their identity for the purpose of building a platform for working with diverse students on projects related to social justice and diversity. However, they thought of their own identity through the lens of the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Participants such as John and Rashid expressed frustration that race and other nonmainstream issues were addressed in abbreviated units interspersed throughout the course in disjointed ways. They called for educators to develop units of study that addressed identity in more complex ways through the lens of intersectionality. When educators hear students and scholars call for a more diversified curriculum they frequently panic and say, "I cannot talk about every racial group in just sixteen weeks!" I want to clarify here that what students and I are suggesting is a matter of quality not necessarily quantity. It is possible for educators to prepare themselves to think about social identity in complex ways and how it works to rank individuals in a stratified society such as the U.S. This basic framework can help both the teacher and students to formulate critical questions and begin to tease out the links between identity, history, power, and privilege.

A second related suggestion is that educators should be prepared to discuss issues from multiple lenses. When the educator chooses to organize the course along the lines of Eurocentrism, the perspectives through which students are allowed to examine course topics is limited as well as the content of the curriculum. For example, in Eva's psychology class the professor could have been open to understanding diabetes as a problem that pointed to individual health patterns as well as highlighted how cultural and sociopolitical factors influence individual health patterns. This would have expanded the analysis and shown Eva and her White classmates how their knowledge intersected in important ways. On this point John stated:

> A lot of times we go through all the feminist theory, and all of a sudden we would do Chicana Feminism one week, instead of having the experiences of women of color built in from the beginning and all throughout the course, or discussing different aspects or different points of view within feminism on each different subject.

John and other students call for topics to be discussed from different even opposing viewpoints, and that the texts are integrated into the curriculum or students. Multiple lens analyses can also be encouraged by treating nonmainstream perspectives treated as a valuable part of everyone's educational experience.

The third suggestion addresses the treatment of race-related issues in class discussion. It is important that educators do not let oversimplified and derogatory statements made about people of color stand. According to my findings, when this happened it often served to reestablish the validity of negative racial stereotypes and myths. This was the case in Makini's class when a student made the sweeping statement that American Indians were alcoholics. Makini surmised that if she did

not correct the statement her classmates would continue to view American Indians as lacking in moral character and will power as opposed to understanding alcoholism in the American Indian community as a health issue with sociopolitical roots. When educators take responsibility for debunking generalized racist comments about people of color then students of color can focus their efforts back to their own academic goals. Developing a curriculum that addresses race-related issues within a socio-historical context coupled with the use of ethnographic studies may also curb White students' and White professors' desires for students of color to disclose their personal stories about racism. In this way the course curriculum provides firsthand accounts that are available to everyone and open to discussion and critical examination.

Participants were direct in their assertion that educators must acquire knowledge in race-related subject areas in order to serve as a moderator during class discussion. I suggest that educators begin to build this knowledge base by researching their subject areas to learn more about how race and racism has influenced the development of their discipline and shaped the popular debates in their field. Here, the absence of race should be noted as a defining feature. Reading outside of one's subject area is important too. Texts in the area of ethnic studies are excellent starting points because they often examine issues from subjugated standpoints and provide a contextual analysis that includes social, cultural, and political forces. Participants in my study modeled this type of extracurricular studies. For example, Jarihd researched certain race-related topics to raise in his intercultural communications class because he wanted to have a rebuttal for the next

time classmates made racist comments. Participants ask educators to be prepared to respond to racist comments in class also.

Students of color wanted to grapple with academic and educational challenges but they did not want to be racially subjugated in college classrooms. For them, a "safe space" was a humane one that was free of racism or at least deemed it acceptable for students to identify and challenge racism openly.

Towards a Racially Humanizing Pedagogy

In calling for educational change, scholar-practitioners make recommendations for policy, institutional practices, or teaching methods that often rely on education as the primary mode of change. In the case of making college classrooms a more hospitable place for students of color, I am split. The suggestions I offer above are relatively concrete, doable, and achievable. For educators, embarking on research will probably be the most comfortable starting point towards reflecting on their racial positionality in class, reformulating their curriculum and pedagogy, and preparing for what could possibly be racially charged discussions among students. I think that certain changes can be made immediately. On the other hand I see that there is another matter that undergirds the problems mapped out here, and that is how do educators begin to view, value, and treat students of color more humanely? Participants in my study are faring well academically meaning they get good grades, are placed in honors level classes, and several have since graduated. To say they are struggling academically would be a misnomer. What they are doing is building resistance against an educational experience that is dehumanizing. The way

they are treated in class is often diminutive or stigmatizing. The curriculum practically erases scholars of color and race-related issues from what is considered to be core disciplinary knowledge. Classroom interactions often leave them relegated to marginal status at best. There is a toxic way in which education and academic achievement is intertwined with racial subjugation to offer students self-improvement and upward mobility on the condition that they accept a subjugated and subhuman status.

Bartolome (2003) has written about a similarly cruel irony found in many teacher education programs. She taught prospective teachers who wanted to serve marginalized students. They looked to teacher-educators such as Bartolome to train them in a repertoire of methods designed specifically to reach marginalized students. Bartolome criticized the logic behind this approach which views the low rates of minority academic achievement as a technical problem that can be solved with better or more specialized methods. The problem, according to Bartolome, cannot be remedied by duplicating a successful pedagogy or program. Bartolome instead urged her students to develop "a sociohistorical view of present-day conditions and concerns that inform the lived experiences of socially perceived minority students" (Bartolome 2003, 410). In other words, Bartolome asked for educators to try to understand the barriers and challenges that youth face in schools and how those problems developed over time through the interplay of social, cultural, and political forces. Bartolome elaborated on the role of schooling in the lives of youth from marginalized groups:

> By understanding the historical specificities of marginalized students, these teacher and prospective teachers come to realize…the historical role that

> schools and their personnel have played (and continue to play), not only in discrimination against many culturally different groups, but also in denying their humanity. By robbing students of their culture, language, history, and values, schools often reduce these students to the status of sub-humans who need to be rescued from their "savage" selves. (2003, 411)

Indeed, I have found that educators often view students as creating barriers for themselves by misbehaving and adopting bad academic habits. In my study, participants were often viewed as the problem themselves when they raised critical race issues. An alternative stance would have been for educators to understand that they were listening to students of color identifying social problems. In the former paradigm students of color were reduced to being a problem rather than understanding that their remarks and rebuttals frequently contained the substance of their "day-to-day reality, struggles, concerns, and dreams" (Bartolome 2003, 410).

A racially humanizing pedagogy sets out to offer a fundamental position for students of color in White-dominated classrooms that as an individual who is entitled to be treated with dignity and respect. Participants in my study spoke directly to their treatment in college classrooms personally, and the intellectual treatment of people of color as subjects or texts. In their own words, racial subjugation woven into the social and institutional context was the most consistently pressing problem they had to contend with on their academic path. I urge educators to seriously consider how to transform White-dominated educational spaces into racially humanizing ones.

REFERENCES

Adams, Maurianne, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin, eds. 1997. *Teaching for diversity and social justice: A sourcebook*. New York: Routledge.

Agnew, Melanie, Tania Mertzman, Hope Longwell-Grice, and Felicia Saffold. 2008. Who's in, who's out: Examining race, gender and the cohort community. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 1, no.1: 20-32.

Allen, Walter R. 1992. The color of success: African-American college student outcomes at predominantly White and historically Black public colleges and universities. *Harvard Educational Review* 62, no.1: 26-44.

Anderson, James A. 1988. Cognitive styles and multicultural populations. *Journal of Teacher Education* 39, no. 1: 2-9.

Angelou, Maya. 1969. *I know why the caged bird sings*. New York: Random House.

Apple, Michael. 1995. *Education and power*. New York: Routledge.

Asante, Molefi K. 1998. *The Afrocentric idea*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Astin, Alexander W. 1982. *Minorities in American higher education: Recent trends, current prospects, and recommendations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Bailey, Alison. 1999. Despising an identity they taught me to claim: Exploring a dilemma of white privilege awareness. *Whiteness: Feminist philosophical narrative*. Eds. Chris J. Cuomo and Kim Q. Hall. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield**,** 85-104.

Banks, James A. and Cherry A. McGee Banks, eds. 2007. *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives*. Boston: John Wiley & Sons.

Bartolome, Lilia I. 2003. Beyond the methods of fetish: Toward a humanizing pedagogy. *A Critical pedagogy reader*. Eds. Antonia Darder, Miguel Baltadano and Rodolfo D. Torres. New York: RoutledgeFarmer.

Baszile, Denise Taliaferro. 2004. Who does she think she is?: Growing up nationalist and ending up teaching race in White space. *A Long way to go: Conversations about race by African American faculty and graduate students*. Ed. Darrell Cleveland. New York: Peter Lang**,** 158-170.

Baszile, Denise Taliaferro. 2008. Beyond all reason indeed: The Pedagogical promise of critical race testimony. *Race, Ethnicity and Education* 11, no.3: 251-265.

Belenky, Mary Field, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule. 1986. *Women's ways of knowing: The development of self, voice, and mind*. New York: Basic Books.

Berlant, Lauren and Michael Warner. 1994. Introduction to "Critical Multiculturalism". *Multiculturalism: A Critical reader*. Ed. David Theo Goldberg. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell Ltd.**,** 107-113.

Boler, Megan. 2000. All speech is not free: The Ethics of affirmative action pedagogy. *Philosophy of Education Yearbook* 2000, 321-329.

Booker, Keonya C. 2007. Perceptions of classroom belongingness among African American college students. *College Student Journal* 41, no. 1 (March): 178-186.

Boostrom, Robert. 1998. 'Safe spaces': Reflections on an educational metaphor." *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 30, no. 4: 397-408.

Cabrera, Alberto F., Amaury Nora, Patrick T. Terenzini, Ernest Pascarella, and Linda Serra Hagedorn. 1999. Campus racial climate and the adjustment of students to college. *The Journal of Higher Education* 70, no.2: 134-160.

Charmaz, Kathy. 2000. Grounded theory: Objectivist and constructivist methods. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Eds. Norman. K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications**,** 509-535.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 1986. Learning from the outsider within: The Sociological significance of Black feminist thought. *Social Problems* 33, no. 6: S14-S32.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 1990. Black feminist thought in the matrix of domination. *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. London, Harper Collins**:** 221-238.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 1991. On our own terms: Self-defined standpoints and curriculum transformation. NWSA Journal 3, no.3: 367-381.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 2000. *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. New York: Routledge.

Darder, Antonio, Marta Baltodano, and Rodolfo D. Torres, eds. 2003. *A critical pedagogy reader*. New York: RoutledgeFarmer.

Delaney, David. 2002. The space that race makes. *The Professional Geographer* 54, no.1: 6-14.

Delgado-Bernal, Dolores. 2002. Critical race theory, Latino critical theory, and critical raced-gendered epistemologies: Recognizing students of color as holders and creators of knowledge. *Qualitative Inquiry* 8, no.1: 105-126.

Delgado, Richard. and Jean Stefancic 2004. *Understanding words that wound.* Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

Delpit, Lisa D. 1995. The silenced dialogue. *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York, New Press**:** 21-47.

Demerath, Peter, Jill Lynch, and Mario Davidson. 2008. Dimensions of psychological capital in a U.S. suburb and high school: Identities for neoliberal times. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 39, no.3: 270-292.

Diangelo, Robin J. 2006. The production of whiteness in education: Asian international students in a college classroom. *Teachers College Record* 108, no.10: 1983-2000.

Dixson, Adrienne D. and Celia K. Rousseau, eds. 2006. *Critical race theory in education: All god's children got a song*. New York: Routledge.

Ellsworth, Elizabeth. 1989. Why doesn't this feel empowering? Working through the repressive myths of critical pedagogy. *Harvard Educational Review* 59, no.3: 297-324.

Ellsworth, Elizabeth. 1997. *Teaching positions: Difference, pedagogy and the power of address*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Ennis, Carolyn Zerbe and Ada L. Sinacore, eds. 2005. *Teaching and social justice: Integrating multicultural and feminist theories in the classroom.* Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Feagin, Joe R. 2006. *Systemic racism: A theory of oppression*. New York: Routledge.

Feagin, Joe R., Herman Vera and Nikitah Imani. 1996. *The agony of education: Black students at White colleges and universities*. New York: Routledge.

Fisher, Berenice Malka. 2001. *No angel in the classroom: Teaching through feminist discourse*. Oxford, England: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

Fordham, Signithia. 1996. *Blacked out: Dilemmas of race, identity, and success at Capital High*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Fordham, Signithia. 2008. Beyond Capital High: On dual citizenship and the strange career of "acting white". *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 39, no.3: 227-246.

Frankenberg, Ruth. 1993. *White women, race matters: The social construction of Whiteness*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Freire, Paulo. 1972. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Penguin Books.

Gilchrist, Jim. 2008. Minuteman project. from http://minutemanproject.com/ [accessed January 2009]

Giroux, Henry A. 1997. Rewriting the discourse of racial identity: Towards a pedagogy and politics of Whiteness. *Harvard Educational Review* 67, no.2: 285-320.

Giroux, Henry A. 1994. Insurgent multiculturalism and the promise of pedagogy. *Multiculturalism: A critical reader*. Ed. David Theo Goldberg. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell**,** 325-343.

Glaser, Barney G., and Strauss Anselm. 1967. *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine Transaction.

Gore, Jennifer. 1992. What we can do for you! What *can* "we" do for "you"?: Struggling over empowerment in critical and feminist pedagogy. *Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy*. Eds. Carmen Luke and Jennifer Gore. New York: Routledge**,** 54-73.

Hall, Horace R. 2008. Student-parent-teacher partnerships: Creating safe classrooms and communities. *Democracy & Education* 18, no.1 (October): 46-49.

Hall, Stuart. 1990. Cultural identity and diaspora. *Identity: Community, culture, difference* 2: 222-237.

Harding, Sandra G., ed. 2004. *The feminist standpoint reader: Intellectual and political controversies*. New York: Routledge.

Harris, Cheryl L. 1992. Whiteness as property. *Harvard Law Review* 106, no.8: 1707-1791.

Henry, Annette. 1993. There are no safe places: Pedagogy as powerful and dangerous terrain. *Action in Teacher Education* 15, no.4: 1-4.

Henze, Rosemary, Tamara Lucas and Beverly Scott. 1998. Dancing with the monster: Teachers discuss racism, power, and White privilege in education. *The Urban Review* 30, no.3: 187-210.

Hernandez-Sheets, Rosa. 2000. Advancing the field or taking center stage: The White movement in multicultural education. *Educational Researcher* 29, no. 9: 15-21.

Heshusius, Louis. 1994. Freeing ourselves from objectivity: Managing subjectivity or turning toward a participator mode of consciousness? *Educational Researcher* 23, no.3: 15-22.

Hirschy, Amy S. and Maureen E. Wilson. 2002. The sociology of the classroom and Its influence on student learning. *Peabody Journal of Education* 77, no.3: 85-100.

Holley, Lynn C. and Sue Steiner. 2005. Safe space: Student perspectives on classroom environment. *Journal of Social Work Education* 41, no.1: 49-64.

hooks, bell. 1989. talking back. *Talking back: Thinking feminist, thinking Black*. Boston: South End Press**,** 5-9.

hooks, bell. 1990a. Choosing the margin as a space of radical openness. *Yearning: Race, gender and cultural politics*. Boston, South End Press**:** 145-153.

hooks, bell. 1990b. Homeplace: A site of resistance. *Yearning: Race, gender, and cultural politics*. Boston: South End Press**,** 41-49.

Howard, Tyrone C. 2008. Who really cares? The disenfranchisement of African American males in pre k-12 schools: A critical race theory perspective. *Teachers College Record* 110, no.5: 954-985.

Hunter, Mary Ann. 2008. Cultivating the art of safe space. *Research in Drama Education* 13, no.1: 5-21.

Hunter, Margaret L. and Kimberly D. Nettles. 1999. What about the White women?: Racial politics in a women's studies classroom. *Teaching Sociology* 27, no.4: 385-397.

Hurtado, Sylvia. 1992. The campus racial climate: Contexts of conflict. *Journal of Higher Education* 63, no.5: 539-569.

Hurtado, Sylvia. 2001. Linking diversity and educational purpose: How diversity affects the classroom environment and student development. *Diversity challenged: Evidence on the impact of affirmative action*. Gary Orfield. Cambridge: Harvard Educational Publishing Group**,** 187-203.

Hurtado, Sylvia, Thomas F. Nelson Laird, Lisa Landreman, Mark E. Engberg and Edith Fernandez. 2002. College students' classroom preparation for a diverse

democracy. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Association of Educational Research. New Orleans, Louisiana. April 1-5.

Jones, Alison. 1999. The limits of cross-cultural dialogue: Pedagogy, desire, and absolution in the classroom. *Educational Theory* 45, no.3: 299-316.

Kanpol, Barry. 1994. *Critical pedagogy: An introduction.* Westport, Connecticut: Bergin & Garvey.

Kaufman, Peter. 2008. Teaching note: Gaining voice through silence. *Feminist Teacher* 18, no.2: 169-171.

Kennedy, Randall. 2002. *Nigger: The strange career of a troublesome word.* New York: Pantheon Books.

King, Joyce E. 1994. Dysconscious racism: Ideology, identity, and the miseducation of teachers. *The Journal of Negro Education Education* 60, no.2 (Spring):133-146.

Kreiger, Susan. 1985. Beyond "subjectivity": The use of the self in social science. *Qualitative Sociology* 8, no.4.

Ladson-Billings, Gloria. 1994. *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. San Francisco:Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Lee, Harper. 1960. *To kill a mockingbird*. Philadelphia: Lippincott.

Lesage, Julia, Abby L. Ferber, Debbie Stors and Donna Wong. 2002. *Making a difference: University students of color speak out*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Li, Huey Li. 2004. Rethinking silencing silences. *Democratic dialogue in education: Troubling speech, disturbing silence*. Ed. Megan Boler. New York: Peter Lang**,** 69-86.

Littlefield, Alice, Leonard Lieberman and Larry T. Reynolds. 1982. Redefining race: The potential demise of a concept in physical anthropology. *Current Anthropology* 23, no.6 (December): 641-655.

Lorde, Audre. 1984. *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches*. California: Crossing Press.

Lugones, Maria C. and Elizabeth V. Spelman. 1990. Have we got a theory for you! feminist theory, cultural imperialism and the demand for 'the woman's voice'. *Hypatia reborn: Essays in feminist philosophy*. Eds. Azizah al-Hibri

and Maragret A. Simons. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press,18-33.

Madkins, Jerry B. and Charles E. Mitchell. 2000. Establishing a "level playing field" for minority students on predominantly Anglo university campuses. Paper preented at the annual meeting of the National Association of African American Studies and National Association of Hispanic and Latino Studies, Houston, Texas. February 21-26.

Maher, Frances A. and Mary Kay Thompson Terteault. 1994. *The Feminist Classroom*. New York: BasicBooks.

Marcus, Ann, Larry C. Mullins, Kimberly P. Brackett, Zongli Tang, Annette M. Allen, and Daniel W. Pruett. 2003. Perceptions of racism on campus. *College Student Journal* 37, no.4 (Decemebr): 611-626.

Margolis, Eric and Mary Romero. 1998. "The department is very male, very White, very old, and very conservative": The functioning of the hidden curriculum in graduate sociology departments. *Harvard Educational Review* 68, no.1: 1-32.

Marshall, Catherine and Gretchen B. Rossman. 2006. *Designing qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Mayberry, Maralee and Ellen Cronan Rose, eds. 1999. *Meeting the challenge: Innovative feminist pedagogies in action*. New York: Routledge.

Mazzei, Lisa A. 2008. Silence speaks: Whiteness revealed in the absence of voice. *Teaching and Teacher Education: An International Journal of Research and Studies* 24, no.5 (July):1125-1136.

McCormack, Arlene Smith. 1998. Revisiting discrimination on campus: 1988, 1992 and 1996. *College Student Journal* 32, no.3 (September): 378-393.

McIntyre, Alice. 2002. Exploring Whiteness and multicultural education with prospective teachers. *Curriculum Inquiry* 32, no.1: 31-49.

McLaren, Peter. 1989. *Life in schools: An introduction to critical pedagogy in the foundations of education*. New York: Longman.

McLeod, Julie and Lyn Yates. 2003. Who is "us"?: Students negotiating discourses of racism and national identification in Australia. *Race, Ethnicity and Education* 6, no.1: 29-49.

Mevorach, Katya G. 2007. Race, racism, and academic complicity. *American Ethnologist* 34, no.2 (May): 238-241.

Miron, Louis F. and Mickey Lauria. 1998. Student voice as agency: Resistance and accomodation in inner-city schools. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 29, no.2: 189-213.

Morrow, Susan L. 2006. Honor and respect: Feminist collaborative research with sexually abused women. *Qualitative research methods for psychologists: Introduction through empirical studies*. Ed. Constance T. Fisher. Burlington, Massachussetts: Academic Press**,** 143-172.

Munoz, Daniel G. 1986. Identifying areas of stress for Chicano undergraduates. *Latino College Students*. Ed. Michael A. Olivas. New York: Columbia University**,** 131-156.

Nieto, Sonia. 2004. *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education.* Boston: Pearson, Allyn & Bacon.

Obama, Barack. 2004. *Dreams of my father: A story of race and inheritance*. New York: Three Rivers Press.

Office of Budget and Institutional Analysis. 2007. Headcount enrollment by ethnicity from 1970 to 2008 Autumn semester census. T. A3. Salt Lake City Utah: University of Utah.

Orner, Mimi. 1992. Interrupting the calls for student voice in "liberatory" education: A feminist poststructuralist perspective. *Feminisms and critical pedagogy*. Carmen Luke and Jennifer Gore. New York: Routledge**,** 74-89.

Perry, Palmer. 2008. Creating safe spaces in predominantly White classrooms. *Everyday antiracism: Getting real about race in school*. Ed. Mica Pollock. New York: The New Press**,** 226-229.

Pewewardy, Cornel and Bruce Frey. 2004. American Indian students' perceptions of racial climate, multicultural support services, and ethnic fraud at a predominantly White university. *Journal of American Indian Education* 43, no.1.

Polkinghorne, Donald E. 1995. Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. *Qualitative Studies in Education* 8, no.1:5-23.

Prillerman, Shelly L., Hector F. Myers and Brian D. Smedley. 1989. Stress, well-being and academic achievement in college. *Black students: Psychological issues and academic achievement*. Eds. Gordon LaVern Berry and Joy Keiko Asamen. Newbury Park, California: Sage,198-217

Quay, Sara E. and Russell J. Quaglia. 2004. Creating a classroom culture that inspires student learning. *The Teaching Professor* 18, no.2: 5.

Rager, Kathleen B. 2005. Self-care and the qualitative researcher: When collecting data can break your heart. *Educational Researcher* 34, no.4: 23-27.

Razack, Sherene H., ed. 2002. *Race, space, and the law: Unmapping a White settler society*. Toronto, Canada: Between the Lines.

Razack, Sherene H. 1998. The gaze from the other side: Storytelling for social change. *Looking White people in the eye: Gender, race, and culture in courtrooms and classrooms*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 36-55.

Reagon, Berenice Johnson and Barbara Smith, eds. 1983. *Home girls: A Black feminist anthology*. New York: Women's Kitchen Table Press.

Rivera, John and Mary Poplin. 1995. Multicultural, critical, feminine and constructive pedagogies seen through the lives of youth: A call for the revisioning of these and beyond: Toward a pedagogy for the next century. *Multicultural education, critical pedagogy, and the politics of difference*. Eds. Christine E. Sleeter and Peter L. McLaren. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press**,** 221-244.

Roediger, David R. 1991. *The wages of Whiteness: Race and the making of the American working class*. London: Verso Books.

Roman, Leslie G. 1993. White is a color!: White defensiveness, postmodernism, and anti-racist pedagogy. *Race, identity, and representation in education*. Cameron McCarthy and Warren Crichlow. New York: Routledge**,** 71-88.

Rosenthall, Michelle. 2001. Danger talk: Race and feminist empowerment in the new South Africa. *Feminism and antiracism: International struggles for justice*. Eds. Frances Widdance Twine and Kathleen M. Blee. New York: University Press**,** 97-124.

Samuel, Edith and Shehla Burney. 2003. Racism, eh? Interactions of South Asian students with mainstream faculty in a predominantly White Canadian university. *The Canadian Journal of Higher Education* 33, no.2 (June): 81-114.

Sanchez-Casal, Susan and Amy A. McDonald, eds. 2002. *Twenty-first century feminist classroom: Pedagogies of identity and difference*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Sandelowski, Margarete. 1995. Sample size in qualitative research. *Research in Nursing & Health* 18, no.2 (April): 179-183.

Schick, Carol. 2002. Keeping the ivory tower white: Discourses of racial domination. *Race, space, and the law: Unmapping a White settler society*. Ed. Sherene H. Razack. Toronto: Between the Lines, 99-120.

Schueller, Malini Johar. 1999. Performing Whiteness, performing Blackness: Dorr's cultural capital and the critique of slavery. *Criticism* 41, no.2: 233-256.

Schulze, Edee and Annette Tomal. 2006. The chilly classroom: Beyond gender. *College Teaching* 54, no. 3: 263-270.

Sedlacek, William E. 1999. Black students on White campuses: Twenty years of research. *Journal of College Student Development* 40, no.5 (September/ October): 538-550.

Shor, Ira. 1980. *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life*. Boston: South End Press.

Shujaa, Mwalimu J. 1993. Education and schooling: You can have one without the other. *Urban Education* 27, no.4: 328-351.

Slattery, Patrick. 2006. Deconstructing racism one statue at a time: Visual culture wars at Texas A&M University and the University of Texas at Austin. *Visual Arts Research* 32, no.2.

Sleeter, Christine E. 1993. How White teachers construct race. *Race, identity and representation in education*. Eds.Cameron McCarthy and Warren Crichlow. New York: Routledge**,** 157-171.

Smedley, Audrey and Brian. D. Smedley. 2005. Race as biology is fiction, racism as a social problem is real: Anthropological and historical perspectives on the social construction of race. *American Psychologist* 60, no.1: 16-26.

Smith, William A., Walter R. Allen and Lynette L. Danley. 2007. Assume the position...you fit the description: Psychosocial experiences and racial battle fatigue among African American male college students. *American Behavioral Scientist* 51, no.4: 551-578.

Smith, William A., Phillip G. Altbach and Kofi Lomotey. 2002. *The racial crisis in American higher education: Continuing challenges for the twenty-first century*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Solorzano, Daniel, Miguel Ceja and Tara Yosso. 2000. Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate: The experiences of African American college students. *Journal of Negro Education* 69, no.1/2: 60-73.

Solórzano, Daniel and Octavio Villalpando. 1998. Critical race theory: Marginality and the experiences of students of color in higher education. *Sociology of Education: Emerging Perspectives.* Eds. Carlos Alberto Torres and Theodore R. Mitchell. Albany: State University of New York Press: 211-224.

Spady, William G. 1970. Dropouts from higher education: An interdisciplinary review and synthesis. *Interchange* 1, no.1: 109-121.

Spradley, James P. 1979. Asking descriptive questions. *The Ethnographic Interview*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston**,** 78-91.

Spradley, James P. 1980. *Participant Observation*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Srivastava, Aruna. 1997. Anti-racism inside and outside the classroom. *Dangerous territories: Struggles for difference and equality in education*. Eds. Leslie G. Roman and Linda Eyre. New York: Routledge**,** 113-126.

Steele, Claude M. 1997. A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance. *American Psychologist* June 52, no.6: 613-699.

Tatum, Beverly Daniel. 1997. *"Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?" and other conversations about race*. New York: Basic Books.

Tehranian, John. 2000. Performing Whiteness: Naturalization litigation and the construction of racial identity in America. *The Yale Law Journal* 109, no.4: 817-848.

Tinto, Vincent. 1975. Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research* 45, no.1 (Winter): 89-125.

Tinto, Vincent. 1994. *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, Vincent. 1997. Classrooms as communities: Exploring the educational character of student persistence. *Journal of Higher Education* 68, no.6 (November-December): 599-623.

Torres, Eden E. 2003. Wisdom and weakness: Freire and education. *Chicana without apology: The new Chicana cultural studies*. New York: Routledge**,** 73-197.

Toynton, Robert. 2006. 'Invisible other': Understanding safe spaces for Queer learners and teachers in adult education. *Studies in the Education of Adults* 38, no.2: 178-194.

Tracey, Terence J. and William E. Sedlacek. 1985. The relationship of noncognitive variables to academic success. A longitudinal comparison by race. *Journal of College Student Personnel* 26, no.5 (September): 405-410.

Turner, Caroline Sotello Viernes. 1994. Guests in someone else's house: Students of color. *The Review of Higher Education* 17, no.4: 355-370.

Turner, Caroline Sotello Viernes, Mildred Garcia, Amaury Nora and Laura I. Rendon, Eds. 1996. *Racial and Ethnic Diversity in Higher Education*. ASHE Reader Series.

TuSmith, Bonnie. 1990. The cultural translator: Toward an ethnic womanist pedagogy. *MELUS* 16, no.2 (Ethnicity and Pedagogy: Summer 1989-Summer 1990): 17-29.

Twain, Mark. 1912. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. New York: Harper & Brothers.

U.S. Department of Education. 1965. *Higher Education Act of 1965*. Pub. L. No.89-329.

Villalpando, Octavio. 2003. Self-segregation or self-preservation? A critical race theory and Latina/o critical theory of analysis of a study of Chicana/o college students. *Qualitative Studies in Education* 16, no.5: 619-646.

Wah, Lee Mun. 2003. *Last chance for eden*. DVD. Directed by Lee Mun Wah. Oakland, California: Stir-Fry Productions.

Walker, Alice. 1982. *The color purple*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Walkerdine, Valerie. 1992. Progressive pedagogy and political struggle. *Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy*. Carmen Luke and Jennifer Gore. New York, Routledge**:** 15-24.

Warnke, Georgia. 2005. Race, gender, and antiessentialist politics. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 31, no.1: 93-116.

Willis, Paul. 1977. *Learning to labour: How working class kids get working class jobs*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Wolfinger, Nicholas H. 2002. On writing fieldnotes: Collection strategies and background expectancies. *Qualitative Research* 2, no.1 (April): 85-93.

Wong, Sabrina T., Jean Ann Seago, Dennis Keane, and Kevin Dumbach, eds. 2008. College students' perceptions of their experiences: What do minority students think? *Journal of Nursing Education* 47, no.4 (April):190-195.

Woodson, Carter G. 1972. *The mis-education of the Negro*. New York: AMS Press.

Wynne, Joan T. 2007. The winds of Katrina still call our names: How do teachers and schools confront social justice issues? *Multicultural Education* 15, no.2 (Winter): 50-51.

Zaner, Richard M. 1998. Review: In response: What's it really all about? *Human Studies* 21, no.1: 63-70.